Firm Foundations

Reading Borough Council
Housing Strategy

2009-2014
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Foreword


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 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 strategy, 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.

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.
Strategic Overview and Context

National Priorities

The Department of Communities and Local Government website states that: “The strategic housing role requires vision, leadership, planning and delivery to:

- Assess and plan for current and future housing needs of the local population
- Make the best use of existing housing stock
- Plan and facilitate new supply
- Plan and commission housing support services which link homes to support and other services that people need to live in them
- Have working partnerships that secure effective housing and neighbourhood management”

The white paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities*\(^2\) emphasises the ‘place-shaping’ role of the strategic housing function, advocating improved services, and connections between services, in an area or neighbourhood, to make life better for citizens and create sustainable communities.

2007’s Housing green paper: *Homes for the future; more affordable, more sustainable*\(^3\) and subsequent *Housing and Regeneration Act*\(^4\) outlines the government’s housing objectives including increasing supply and the delivery of 3 million new homes by 2020.

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. Equally, *Valuing People Now (2009)*\(^6\), provides a clear steer to Local Authorities that there should be a decrease in residential care for disabled adults and an increase of more independent accommodation options. A recurring theme in recent guidance is the need to invest in up-grading and maximising utilisation of private sector stock to reduce the otherwise inevitable impact on supply.

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\(^2\) Communities and Local Government (October 2006) - *Strong and Prosperous Communities: The Local Government White Paper*  
\(^3\) Communities and Local Government (July 2007) - *Homes for the future; more affordable, more sustainable*  
\(^4\) Office of Public Sector Information (2008) – *Housing and Regeneration Act*  
\(^6\) Department of Health (2009) – *Valuing People Now*
Regional Priorities

The South East Plan

*The South East Plan*, adopted in May 2009, is a spatial strategy for sustained housing and economic growth in the region and is strongly linked to the provision of infrastructure and services. The centre of Reading is identified as part of a network of primary regional centres and a ‘Centre for Significant Change’. Within the plan, Reading falls into the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley sub-region and the priority for this area is to build on the region’s current strengths, to address the pockets of deprivation in parts of Reading and to allow the economy to grow whilst not putting undue pressure on the very resources that have enabled it to thrive. This includes the transport systems, labour force, infrastructure and environmental assets.

It is clear from the South East Plan that Reading is recognised as a thriving hub in the south east, but that there is also the need for regeneration to tackle the issues of deprivation and high housing need. In addition, any future development focussed on the Reading area would need to run in parallel with improvements to the established infrastructure. This will include, for example, improvements to the railway station, Junction 11 of the M4 and community development within parts of the local area.

Regional Economic Strategy

The *Regional Economic Strategy* (RES) was launched in 2006 and covers the period until 2016. Reading is part of the ‘Inner South East’ and is named as one of 8 ‘diamonds for investment and growth’, which are cities and major towns that could act as a catalyst for prosperity in the region. The RES indicates that Reading and the sub-region will continue to out-perform regional levels over the next 20 years. The recent change in the global and national economy has altered the projections for growth expected in the region, but Reading is still identified as one of the strongest areas economically and will see a reduced impact of the recession in comparison to other areas of the country and region. It is vital that the necessary housing and infrastructure is developed in order for Reading to fully exploit its economic potential in this uncertain time.

The Regional Housing Strategy for the South East, linked to the *Regional Economic and South East Plan*, sets out three priorities:

- Build more houses
- Bring decent housing within reach of people on low income
- Improve the quality of new housing and existing stock

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7 South East England Regional Assembly (2009) – *South East Plan*
9 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*
Local Priorities and context

City 2020 Vision.

In 1999, Reading City 2020 set out a vision for the town to be the capital of the Thames Valley. It would be a city for all and would provide a good quality of life to people of all ages and backgrounds who live, work or visit.

“By the year 2020, Reading will be established as the capital of the Thames Valley and as a gateway between the United Kingdom, the rest of Europe and the World. It will provide the highest quality services and facilities for all our residents, businesses and visitors across all of Reading’s neighbourhoods.

Our vision is to maintain and improve the quality of life in Reading, embracing the challenges of a dynamic, inclusive urban community of the 21st century. Everyone will have the opportunity to benefit from all that Reading can offer. Everyone has a part to play in shaping our future.”

Since 1999, Reading has continued to grow in regional importance and in turn the town has developed in order to meet the challenges that this brings. In 2008, a new Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) was published; Reading 2020, Shaping Reading’s Future and the vision for the town remained the same. It promotes the continuing growth of Reading whilst recognising that this growth needs to be sustainable and inclusive, creating prosperous and cohesive communities.

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

In parallel to the development of the new SCS, Reading’s Local Strategic Partnership negotiated a new Local Area Agreement (LAA), which reflects key priorities within the strategy. In addition to the priorities within the Decent and Affordable Housing Chapter, further priorities of the SCS and LAA that relate to this agenda are:

A Fairer Reading for All
- Reduce inequality between Reading’s neighbourhoods

10 Reading Borough Council (2008) - Reading 2020, Shaping Reading’s Future
11 Ibid
• 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
• To 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

In order to deliver the above priorities of the Sustainable Communities Strategy in partnership with all areas of Reading Local Strategic Partnership, the Housing Strategy will be aligned with the following strategic documents:

• Children and Young People’s 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 Planning Obligations SPD)
• Climate Change Strategy
• Adult Social Care Strategies
• HRA Business Plan
• Asset Management Plan
• Anti Poverty Strategy
Reading: Where are we now and what challenges do we face?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing in Reading - Key Facts and Figures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size: 149,548(^{12})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children 0-15 - 25,800 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Working age adults - 97,200 (68%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Older People - 20,800 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME population: 13%(^{13})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Tenure**                                |
| Number of dwellings: 64,388\(^{14}\)      |
| Homes owner occupied: 35,639 (55.3%)      |
| Rented from a private landlord: 17,806 (27.4%) |
| - Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) - 5.5% (1.4% Licensable) |
| - Student accommodation: 1.9% (1254)      |
| Rented from a RSL: 3,762 (5.8%)           |
| Rented from Reading Borough Council (Including those in the PFI Area): 7,178 (11.1%) |
| Miscellaneous: 3\(^{15}\) (0.4%)          |

| **Affordability**                          |
| Average property price in Reading: £184,242 (Land Registry, April 2009). |
| Average cost of a privately rented property: |
|   - 1 bed properties: £654                  |
|   - 2 bed properties: £787                  |
|   - 3 bed properties: £884                  |
|   - 4 bed properties: £1203                 |
|   - 5+ bed properties: £1976\(^{16}\)       |

Households on the Council’s Housing Register: 4834 - April 2009 (4,504 in April 2008)

Reading Borough Council is located in the South East of England, 41 miles west of London, and is one of the six unitary authorities within the County of Berkshire. Reading Borough borders three other district authorities: Wokingham District Council, West Berkshire Council and South Oxfordshire District Council, as well as Oxfordshire County Council. The urban area centred on Reading extends beyond the Borough boundaries into West Berkshire and Wokingham. Reading also has strong travel to work links with Basingstoke and North Hampshire along the A33 corridor. It is a densely

\(^{12}\) GLA 2006 Estimates
\(^{13}\) 2001 Census
\(^{14}\) Housing Statistical Appendix 2008
\(^{15}\) October 2008
\(^{16}\) http://www.rpia.co.uk/reading_rental_property_index.htm (accessed April 09)
populated urban area covering 40 square kilometres, a small geographical area in comparison to our neighbours.

The Thames Valley area has been highly successful in attracting key investment in sectors such as computing, research and development, business and financial services, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals and the automotive industry. Reading itself has seen a dramatic change in the structure of its economy over the past 25 years and is now home to the largest concentration of ICT corporations in the UK. It is the service and financial centre of the Thames Valley region and beyond. It has a large number of business parks and industrial areas with several more just outside its boundaries in adjoining districts. In economic terms, the Thames Valley is one of the most buoyant areas in the UK, and is often seen as one of the key drivers of the national economy.

An important factor in Reading’s success is its connectivity, successfully acting as a regional transport hub and major transport interchange. Reading provides the main rail gateway to parts of the South West, Midlands and North of England with links nationwide and internationally. This connectivity will increase over the next 5 years as major improvement works are completed to junction 11 of the M4 and to the main railway station.

A discussion paper prepared by Centre for Cities\textsuperscript{17}, evidences that based on employment, population growth and skills, Reading is England’s top performing city. Based on statistics from 1995 to 2004, the Borough had an employment growth level of 25.1 per cent with just 8.5% of the working age population with no qualifications. A recent update of the paper in January 2009 shows that there was a further employment growth of 4.5 in 06-07 and the number of residents with formal qualifications had decreased further to 8%. Compared to the average for Great Britain, earnings of Reading residents are generally high. Reading residents in 2008 had an average gross weekly pay of £562, compared to £475 for Great Britain and placing it second only to London\textsuperscript{18}. Employment rates for 2008 were 81.3% placing Reading 5\textsuperscript{th} in the country in comparison to other cities and 8.4% workless households\textsuperscript{19}. The economic growth and success within the region is projected to continue, with Reading formally recognised by its ‘Growth Point’ status.

However, the deepening recession has ended a decade of stability and growth that has led to employment gains for many of the UK cities and large urban areas. The January 2009 Centre for Cities paper\textsuperscript{20} also reviewed major towns and cities in the country and their ability to both survive the recession and lead the recovery. It suggests, “Cities with a diverse business base, high skill levels and traditions of entrepreneurship will be better placed to recover”. Some parts of the South East will bounce back both

\textsuperscript{17} Institute for Public Policy Research, July 2007
\textsuperscript{18} Centre for Cities (2009) – \textit{Cities Outlook 2009}
\textsuperscript{19} ONS – January –December 2007
\textsuperscript{20} Centre for Cities (2009) – \textit{Cities Outlook 2009}
quickly and strongly but the picture will vary between the difference towns, cities and economies. This report states that Reading, for the purposes of the report classed as a city, is in a comparatively robust position to cope with the economic down turn. It places Reading in the top three cities for innovation (a key factor in coping with an economic down turn) and second on the Economic Prosperity Index. However, no town or city will escape the recession un-scathed and it is universally acknowledged that “all bets are off” when discussing the economic development of any area over the next 3-5 years.

The success of Reading with its strong buoyant economy is not the complete picture and masks some wider social issues. Within a small geographical area, Reading combines some very affluent communities with more deprived neighbourhoods where poor health, lack of skills, unemployment and poverty are features. On the Government’s Index of Multiple Deprivation (2007) it is ranked 151 out of 354\(^{21}\) and there are 11 out of 93 Super Output Areas (SOAs) in the 20% most deprived in England. Whilst Reading has seen some significant improvements in performance in some areas, the 2007 indices of deprivation indicates that the gap between the most deprived and the more advantaged is growing. The situation has worsened overall with 11 SOAs in the 20% most deprived in England compared to 8 in 2004. This is in line with the South East trend.

In January 2009, 16.3% of primary aged children and 11.7% of secondary school aged children enrolled in Reading Borough Council schools were eligible for free school meals. This compares to a national average of 15.9% and 13.4 respectively\(^{22}\). In Reading we have shown an increase in eligibility for primary schools but a decrease for secondary schools. It is worth noting that in 2008, more than 30% of pupils in ten RBC schools were eligible for free school meals The town has the largest proportion of lone parents with dependent children among the six Berkshire authorities. Whitley ward has the highest proportion of lone parents at 11%. The polarisation of the communities within the borough boundaries is further emphasised by the fact that in March 2009 only approximately 9% of the population in Reading were claiming Housing and Council Tax benefits, yet 81% of all tenants and 60% of working age social housing tenants were in receipt of Housing Benefit.

Although Reading has a significant and relatively high proportion of people educated to degree level and higher, there are also significant numbers of Reading residents with low or no qualifications and figures for 14-19 year olds who are not in employment, education or training (referred to as NEET), whilst reducing, remain above the national average.

The borough has the third most diverse population in the South East Region, with 134 languages spoken in our schools. The 2001 census recorded 13% of the population as from black and minority ethnic communities, with the

\(^{21}\) Where one is the most deprived
\(^{22}\) ONS Data - Accessed in May 2009
largest non-white community being Pakistani - comprising almost 3% of the population. The January 2008 school census shows that 39% of pupils came from a non-British heritage background (in comparison to 29.5% in January 2005). From 2007, there has been an increase in migrants from the EU accession states, in particular Poland\textsuperscript{23}.

The table below shows the break down of Reading’s population by ethnicity. It is also worth noting that the white populations of Wokingham and West Berks are 94% and 97% respectively.

**Reading’s Population by Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Reading %</th>
<th>South East %</th>
<th>England &amp; Wales %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>91.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black British</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese or Other</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 2001 Census*

National research demonstrates that a relatively high proportion of Indian and Pakistani Households live in overcrowded conditions compared to the overall population, despite owner occupation being relatively high among these communities\textsuperscript{24}. Pakistani households are also more likely to have low incomes and a disproportionate number live in overcrowded or poor housing conditions\textsuperscript{25}.

Analysis at a ward level clearly indicates that certain areas of the town have a significantly higher proportion of BME communities than others. Please see map below:

\textsuperscript{23} The Institute of Community Cohesion 2008
\textsuperscript{24} Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2002) *Ethnic Diversity, Neighbourhoods and Housing*
\textsuperscript{25} Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2003) *Housing Research Summary – Housing and Black Minority Ethnic Communities*
The map above highlights the high numbers of BME population in central and east Reading. In brackets it indicates where there is a higher proportion of a particular ethnicity, for example Black Caribbean in the west. Where there is an even distribution across ethnicities this is shown by the term ‘even mix Black & Asian’, applying to all Black and Asian ethnicity groups.

It is also worth noting that there is a higher proportion of Asian communities living to the east of the borough, predominantly Pakistani households, with
a higher percentage of black communities, predominantly Caribbean households, to the west of the borough.

**Population and Household Growth Predictions**

Making projections for future population and household growth is not an exact science. There are a number of different sources of projection statistics that result from different models and methodology.

The Office of National Statistics (ONS) population projections are derived from assumptions about births, deaths and migration based on trends over the last five years. They do not take into account any future policy changes. The GLA puts ONS figures through a model that looks at recent new build housing completions, permissions and commitments for new developments in the area. It is also important to note that statistical projections can provide evidence of trends and changes to the demography without exact figures being necessary, and that changes to both the planning policy and the market drivers in the town may influence future releases of projection data. It is important to recognise these changes as the structure of the population influences the level, type and tenure of housing that is required. For example, Reading’s younger and more mobile population creates a higher demand for privately rented accommodation and as such, the region’s residents may face increased barriers to achieving home ownership.

A summary of the expected growth in Reading is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2008 Round GLA Projections:</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Economically Active Population</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Average Household Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>144,684</td>
<td>78,210</td>
<td>57,948</td>
<td>2.421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>149,548</td>
<td>84,129</td>
<td>61,863</td>
<td>2.346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>154,914</td>
<td>89,126</td>
<td>65,554</td>
<td>2.297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>159,776</td>
<td>92,647</td>
<td>69,203</td>
<td>2.246</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Historically, the population growth in the West Central Berkshire area has been considerable, growing by 19% between 1981 and 2004. This compares to a growth of 8% in the East Berkshire area for the same period and much of this growth is focussed in the urban area - specifically Reading. It is important to establish whether population growth is driven by expansion in one or more specific age bracket as this may indicate a demand for a particular type and size of dwelling or tenure, or will have a particular pull on services. Berkshire as a whole currently has a bias towards a younger population, a situation that is accentuated in Reading.
Projected population increase by age

The graph above highlights the trends in population growth that Reading is predicted to experience. The age group 20-39 will continue to be the largest group residing within the town, and it is expected that the numbers of residents falling within this age group will first increase before starting to slightly decrease. Equally, in line with the national trend, the number of older people within the town will show an increase overall, predominantly in the 60-79 year olds.

The Housing Market Area

In 2006, Reading Borough Council commissioned the *Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment* (HMA)\(^26\) in partnership with the five other authorities within Berkshire. The HMA identified that two sub-regional housing markets - the ‘Reading M4 West’ sub-region and the ‘Inner West Slough Hounslow’ sub-region, cover Berkshire. The Reading M4 West area is one of the largest geographical areas in the South East and focusses on Reading and the wider urban area as a centre of employment. There are high levels of household relocations between West Berkshire, Reading and Wokingham but limited transfer between Reading and Basingstoke. Therefore the housing market area is seen to have its boundary line along the northern district boundary of Basingstoke.

Reading is the largest urban area within Berkshire and the spatial definition transcends the administrative boundaries and takes in a large part of Wokingham and parts of West Berkshire. The area is ringed on the East, South and West by major employment centres and business parks located

\[^26\] DTZ Consulting & research (2007) – *Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment*
near key transport access points. Other urban areas in the county tend to be smaller and more concentrated.

The relationship between the Berkshire urban areas can be assessed via the travel to work patterns and household migration patterns. Reading is the area with the largest volume of household movements, with the greatest amount of inward migration coming from Newbury/Thatcham, Wokingham and Bracknell. Further migration also comes from the Black Water Valley, Maidenhead, Oxford and Slough, but there is limited inward migrations from further afield – 92% of relocating households to the Reading area moving from other parts of the same urban area. The outward migration and destinations mirrors that of inward migration but there are key differences in the age and composition of the households migrating in either direction. Young professionals are attracted to the Reading area due to both the prosperity of the town and busy night-time economy. Families with children and older more affluent couples tend to move to neighbouring boroughs.

The household projections within the Housing Market Assessment indicate that for Reading the percentage break down of household growth by 2026 will be:
- Couple Households - 7%
- Lone Parent Households - 17%
- Single Person Households (many will be elderly)- 65%
- Multi Person Households - 12%

The 2008 update of these projections are detailed below:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married Couple Households</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cohabitng Couple Households</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lone Parent Households</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other two+ person Adult Households</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>One-person Households</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Households</td>
<td>57948</td>
<td>61863</td>
<td>65554</td>
<td>69203</td>
<td>72927</td>
<td>76651</td>
<td>11255</td>
<td>19.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Household Size</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>144684</td>
<td>149548</td>
<td>154914</td>
<td>159776</td>
<td>165192</td>
<td>170808</td>
<td>15092</td>
<td>10.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DTZ Consulting & research (2007) – Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment
Affordability of Buying or Renting Privately in Reading

The recent change in the economic climate and housing market has made it extremely difficult to state how affordable property is to purchase on both a local and national level.

Until the middle of 2008 property prices in Reading were high and in September 2008, 80% of first time buyers in Reading were priced out of the market. However, Land Registry data for February 2009 indicates a 17.4% annual decrease in house prices in the Borough with the average price being £184,242. There was also a dramatic drop in the number of sales completed, falling by over 50%. This can be set against an average increase of house values of 12.1% between February 2007 and 2008. Despite this fall in value, house prices remain above the historical average of house price to earnings ratio. At the same time the tightening of available credit, and perhaps caution concerning future house price values, meant that loans to first time buyers fell over the last year by 46% to 194,200. Mortgages granted to people moving home dropped by more than half to 322,200.

Higher deposits are being required with first time buyers putting down an average deposit of 22% and two thirds of all mortgage deals taking at least a 25% deposit (until the end of 2007 10% or less was the norm). First time buyers with the appropriate deposits are using a lower multiple of income to loan value, making mortgage payments a smaller percentage of their income, and the overall value of loans taken out has also fallen.

This limitation in the availability of mortgage products has therefore not made owner occupation any more accessible to many residents and many first time buyers are still unable to purchase property. Equally, in line with the national trend, the number of house sales has decreased dramatically which has led to an increase in the number of properties being rented out privately. It is thought that the flood of properties available has led to a decline in the price of privately rented properties but in April 2009 the average price of a two-bed property in Reading was still £787 per month and seems to be fluctuating on a monthly basis. Whilst prices may have dropped, many residents still struggle to afford this level of rent.

Tenure balance of the stock

- 64,388 Households (April 08)
- Owner Occupiers = 35,640 (55.4%)
- Private Rented Sector = 17,805 (27.7%)  
- Intermediate Housing = 1242 (1.9%)
  - Shared Ownership - 1144 (1.7%)
  - Intermediate Rent - 98 (0.2%)

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28 As of April 2009
29 Residential Retail Price Index accessed April 2009
30 Reading Borough Council (2008) – Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix
31 Council Tax Data accessed October 2008
• Social housing = 9,701 (15%)
  o LA owned - 7,178 (11%)
  o RSL owned - 2,523 (4%)

Nationally the stock of dwellings has changed significantly over the past decade. The stock of local authority owned properties has shrunk due to the barriers to building and the effects of Right-To-Buy. Simultaneously the stock of housing association properties has increased due to new development and the transfer of local authority owned stock. Reading Borough Council is still a stock-holding authority and therefore both the largest landlord and social housing provider in the borough. In addition, Reading Borough Council has a successful PFI scheme managing 1,339 properties in the North Whitley Area.

Owner Occupation

As with the national trend, owner occupation continues to be the largest tenure in the borough but at 55%, it is significantly below the regional average of 75% as stated in the HMA in 2006. This is due to the limited affordability of owner occupation and the dramatic shift towards the private rented sector as a result of the boom in the buy-to-let market, influenced by the migration patterns described above.

Private Rented Sector (Including Students):

The 2006 Private Sector Stock Condition Survey\(^{32}\) states that 20% of Reading’s households live within the PRS, which is substantially higher than the national average of 11.9%. Recent analysis of Council Tax data indicates that this figure is even higher and that 27.4% of the dwellings in Reading are currently rented privately\(^{33}\).

\(^{32}\) Reading Borough Council (2006) – Private Sector House Condition Survey
\(^{33}\) Analysis based on October 2008 Council Tax return
6.9% (3,520) of dwellings in Reading are categorised as Houses of Multiple Occupation\textsuperscript{34} (HMO), as per the Housing Act (2004) definition. 1.4% (900) of

\textsuperscript{34} Reading Borough Council (2006) – *Private Sector House Condition Survey*
these are considered to be subject to mandatory licensing (three stories or
have five or more tenants - Housing Act 2004). The number of HMO requiring
planning permission is only a small percentage of the HMO within the
borough.

Students

The Council Tax data for October 2008 shows that 1,254 dwellings in the
borough are either exempt from paying or are paying a reduced Council Tax
contribution, as they are registered as being occupied by students. This is
1.9% of the dwellings within Reading's boundaries and 35.6% of the HMO.
The University is also committed to maintaining its strong residential profile
their halls development programme shows an intention to continue to offer
high quality, well-managed accommodation to students as an alternative to
the private rented sector.

Intermediate Housing

Intermediate housing, normally in the form of Shared Ownership or
Intermediate Rent is housing set at prices that are above that of social rent
but below market prices or rent. Social Rented Housing is allocated on the
basis of need and guideline target rents are set through a national rent
regime. The development of both new build intermediate housing and social
rented housing requires subsidy from the Homes and Communities Agencies
or other forms of funding with social rented housing requiring a higher level
of grant funding.

Shared Ownership

Reading currently has a stock of 1,144 shared ownership properties. The
zone agent for an area holds the waiting list for these properties and for
Reading this is currently Catalyst Housing Group. Due to the reduction of
mortgage products available for this tenure, and the additional impact of
the economic downturn, the demand for new build shared ownership has
reduced. It is expected that there will be a sharp reduction in the number
of units built for this tenure over the next three to five years. There is also
a range of shared equity products now available to assist people with
purchasing properties on the open market, the most common being ‘My
Choice Homebuy’. The 'My Choice Homebuy' scheme was launched in April
2008 and by the end of March 2009, 53 purchases had been completed in
Reading. This scheme is available to both key workers and non key workers,
34 non key workers and 19 key workers have been assisted in to home
ownership in Reading through the scheme. Reading has predicted a further
25 ‘My Choice Homebuy’ completions in Reading in 2009/10.

The Open Market Homebuy Scheme ran until September 2008. On that
scheme, there were 3 non-key workers and 7 key workers.
Intermediate Rent

In December 2008, there were 130 intermediate rent properties in Reading. These properties are predominantly advertised under the choice-based lettings scheme in place for social housing, with a few schemes being allocated to directly from specific employment sectors. Intermediate rent properties are predominantly one and two bed flats (53.9% and 45.4% respectively) with only one (0.7%) three bed unit available.

Social Rented

Reading Borough Council is a stock holding Local Authority and still owns 74% of the social housing within the town. The age profile of Reading Borough Council tenants shows that there are disproportionate numbers of older people in social housing in comparison to the rest of the town’s population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>% of total</th>
<th>RBC Tenants</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-64</td>
<td>95,846</td>
<td>84.3%</td>
<td>4504</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>8,815</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>859</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-84</td>
<td>6,420</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>669</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85+</td>
<td>2,565</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Aged 18+</td>
<td>113,646</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>6370</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As of January 2009, only 85% of tenants age recorded

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35 As of January 2009, only 85% of tenants age recorded
The map below indicates the distribution of the Local Authority Owned Stock throughout the town.

The largest concentration of Reading Borough Council stock is located predominately in South and West Reading. The remaining social housing owned by registered social landlords is also predominantly in the South and West of the town. Demand for all areas is strong amongst applicants, with Caversham being most popular in terms of first choice. The next most
popular first choices for applicants is the central area of Reading, while 19.5% express no particular preference for the area of their first choice.

Reading Borough Council’s stock consists of houses, bungalows, flats and maisonettes. The oldest properties can be found within our dispersed non-estate portfolio where houses are approximately 130 years old with the most recently built Council property dating from the 1980s. 78% of Reading’s remaining stock is post-1945.

Inspected in 2006 by the Audit Commission the Landlord Services arm of Reading Borough Council’s Housing department was awarded a grade of ‘Good service provided with promising prospects for improvement’. The management of this stock is delivered via the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and the Housing Service Plan. The HRA Business Plan is due to be refreshed in 2009.

Allocations

In October 2008 Reading Borough Council went live with a choice-based lettings (CBL) system, known as ‘Homechoice at Reading’.

Communities and Local Government (CLG) set all local authorities a target to implement choice-based lettings by 2010. Following a Best Value Service Review of Reading Borough Council’s Housing Needs service in 2005, it became apparent that service users found the allocations policy and process difficult to understand, with a traditional but complex points system used to determine housing needs and award priority for applicants.

The aim of implementing CBL was to enable greater customer choice and transparency of the allocations process, to increase customer satisfaction and reduce the time spent by officers selecting applicants from housing lists. It was anticipated this would also reduce the number of refusals and complaints about the allocations process.

The introduction of CBL has brought about a fundamental and exciting change in the way customers are enabled to make decisions and choice about their future housing. Feedback from customers who have been using the local access points across Reading, which include our local libraries, Housing Advice shops and ground floor reception, has been very positive.

Homelessness Acceptances

In 2008/09 Reading Borough Council accepted 127 homeless applicants, which was a decrease of 12.4% from 2007/08. However, the number of approaches to the Housing Options Service increased by 7.8% for the same period. The pattern of both presentations and acceptances are shown in graph below:

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36 Reading Borough Council (2004) – Housing Revenue Account Business Plan
37 Reading Borough Council (2009) – Housing Service Plan
Housing Options Approaches and Homeless Acceptances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Acceptances</th>
<th>Approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>1860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>2180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use of Temporary Accommodation

The graph below shows the average number of households in temporary accommodation per year and shows a successful decrease in the last five years, exceeding government targets.
Equally the number of households placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation has decreased from an average number of 9 in 2005/06 to 3 in 2008/09 and this continues the pattern of reduction over the last 4 years.

The decrease in both the number of homelessness acceptances and the reduction in the use of temporary accommodation and bed & breakfast indicates the success of the measures put in place by Reading Borough Council and partners to prevent homelessness occurring. In addition, the reduction in the use of temporary accommodation is disproportionately higher than the reduction in presentations, which reflects a decrease in the length of time households are waiting for settled accommodation. However, the prevention of homelessness continues to be a challenge for Reading with six rough sleepers identified on the 2008 head count completed by the CLG.
Strategy Development

Review of the Housing Strategy 2004

Since the publication of the 2004 Housing Strategy, Reading Borough Council and partners has achieved the following:

- Landlord service was identified as delivering a two star service with promising prospects for improvement by the audit commission
- Signed the groundbreaking PFI for North Whitley and the investment programme was completed 18 months ahead of schedule
- Delivered the Best Value Review of Housing Management and identified savings and an improvement plan through this process
- Established a multi-agency project to deliver an intensive supported housing scheme for ex-rough sleepers with a history of drug & alcohol misuse, one of our core target groups. The scheme is due to deliver in March 2007 and funding of £350,000 was won from government
- Signed off the Stock Options Appraisal process with a clear ability to retain the stock in Council ownership and management
- Established the Dee park regeneration project and adopted a groundbreaking ‘Competitive Dialogue’ process for procurement. Developed in partnership with residents, the initiative is more in-depth that anything previously seen in Reading
- Introduced a choice-based lettings scheme for the allocation of all social housing within the borough
- Secured £28m in 2004-06 and £19m in 2006-08 in allocation for affordable housing through the Housing Corporation. This will fund over 1000 new homes
- Completed a Housing Market assessment in partnership with the other Berkshire Authorities
- Been awarded ‘Growth Point’ status by DCLG which is set to bring greater resources to the town
- Assessed as providing one of the highest performing support services in the Borough as our Floating Support team have been successfully reviewed by Supporting People and awarded a ‘B’ grade
- Restructured and reshaped our landlord service to achieve greater integration across the Directorate and drive out costs while increasing focus on our core business, tenants and customer care
- A new partnership with the Housing Corporation for investment, local management and governance of Registered Social Landlords in Reading, through the establishment of the Joint Investment Protocol;

Research

The Housing Strategy is based on information and intelligence from a number of sources. These include but are not limited too:

- Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2006 and 2008 update
• Analysis of the Council’s internal data (Housing Register and Council Tax records)
• Readings Annual Monitoring Report as required under the Local Development Scheme
• Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix 2008
• BME Housing Survey
• Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2008
• Private Sector House Condition Survey 2006
• 2001 Census

Consultation

Starting in September 2008, Reading borough Council completed the first phase of consultation in respect to the Housing Strategy. A range of residents and organisation, including the general public, were asked to consider a number issues and priorities that had been identified by officers of Reading Borough Council and partners, and assess if they agreed that they reflect their views at to the needs of Reading Borough.

This first phase of consultation included, but is not limited to, the following events and communications:

- Launch conference with a range of stakeholders
- Wide distribution of an Issues and Options paper to organisations including key stakeholders, political parties, voluntary organisations, established partnership boards
- Presentations to established groups
- Drop in event for members of the public
- Distribution of Issue and Options paper at key access points in the town
- Publication of Issues and Options paper on internet with online response form

The second phase of consultation allowed residents, stakeholders and any interested party the opportunity to comment on the draft document. With the exception of the launch conference, and they introduction of the distribution of 3500 leaflets advertising the consultation, the second phase of consultation mirrored the methods used in the first. In total 127 responses were received and a full consultation report is available in appendix three.
**Reading Borough Council’s Vision for Housing**

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. 38”

It is vital that, to maintain and develop the place-shaping role of Reading Borough Council, the local authority continues to provide appropriate housing and environments to support the economic growth of the town, in a way that is sustainable for the future. The housing requirements of all residents must be recognised but the housing needs of residents that are vulnerable or on a low income must continue to be a priority.

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

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38Reading Borough Council (2008) - Reading 2020, Shaping Reading’s Future
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
**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.*

**Strategic Objective 1 - Context:**

When planning for the housing market it is helpful to be clear as to the difference between Housing Demand, Housing Need and Housing Requirement.

**Housing demand** is the quantity and type of housing that households want and are able to afford either to purchase or rent on the open market.

**Housing need** is the quantity of housing required for households that are unable to access suitable housing without financial assistance.

**Housing requirement** is a combination of both housing demand and need - the amount of housing needed to accommodate the population at a minimum standard.  

This strategy looks to meet the Housing Requirements of the Borough but with recognition that there is a limit to the control the Local Authority has over the housing market in comparison to market forces.

The demand for housing can be broken down into two main drivers - internal and external. Internal includes the natural rate of population growth combined with the rate of household formation. Equally as influential but less predictable are the external drivers, predominantly the effects of migration. The migration patterns in the Thames Valley have already been described above.

Nationally the number of households per thousand people has increased due to the change in family make-up, the increased elderly population and the number of adults who choose to live alone. In the Central West Berkshire area the number of households increased by 13% between 1991 and 2001 whereas the average growth for the South East in the same period was 11%.

The *Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment* states that within Reading, the largest growth between now and 2026 will be in single person households, predominantly elderly, but the majority of households will still be couple and family households. Based on these predictions, the HMA provides guidance on the percentage breakdown of the size properties required for new households: 10% four bed+ and 30% each of three, two and one beds. However it is also acknowledged that when purchasing property

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39 DTZ Consulting & research (2007) – *Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment*

40 Ibid
people often buy larger than they need. In Reading approximately 90% of the developments in Reading in the last two years have been one and two bed flats. This build has been predominately driven by market forces due to the number of young professionals migrating to the town and the outward migration of families, perpetuating the rise of the buy-to-let market. Although enabling the Local Authority to meet a previous objective of increasing the amount of key worker housing in the town, this skew towards smaller, developments of flats will not fully meet the projected needs of residents.

With recognition of the Government’s target to build three million new homes by 2020, Reading Borough Council is committed to delivering an average of 611 new units of accommodation per year until 2026 (12,220 units required in total) as set out in the South East Plan\textsuperscript{41}.

A draft \textit{Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment} (SHLAA)\textsuperscript{42} for Reading was completed in December 2008. The SHLAA provides background evidence for the \textit{draft Site Allocation Document}\textsuperscript{43} (due to be adopted in December 2010) and in turn supports Reading Borough Council’s \textit{Core Strategy}\textsuperscript{44} adopted in January 2008. Future housing provision is a central aspect of the Core Strategy, particularly because of Reading’s role as a Regional Hub and a New Growth Point. One of the key areas for the \textit{Site Allocations Document} is the identification and allocation of sufficient housing sites to meet the overall requirement to 2026 and spatial distribution identified in the Core Strategy. The overall provision of housing will be supported by the production of a Housing Delivery Plan, which will be used to monitor and manage the housing supply against requirements. The Council will monitor and update the Housing Delivery Plan on an annual basis through the \textit{Annual Monitoring Report} to ensure it meets the Core Strategy objectives, vision and wider national policy framework for sustainable community approach.

The draft SHLAA, indicates that there is a reasonably healthy level of potential supply within the boundaries of the town, between 12,720 - 14,346 potential units. This is an adequate supply of land in order to meet the outstanding supply target of 10,746 by 2026\textsuperscript{45}, but further assessment of each site will need to be completed in respect to other constraints and potential timescales for development.

Local Development Framework policies are also seeking a change in the type and size of property being developed in order to create sustainable communities.

Migration patterns in the HMA indicate that a proportion of affluent family households and older people who can afford to buy or move, are choosing to

\textsuperscript{41} South East England Regional Assembly (2009) – \textit{South East Plan}
\textsuperscript{42} Reading Borough Council (2008) – \textit{draft Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment}
\textsuperscript{43} Reading Borough Council (2008) – \textit{draft Site Allocation Document}
\textsuperscript{44} Reading Borough Council (2008) – \textit{Core Strategy}
\textsuperscript{45} Figure as of December 2008
move to neighbouring authorities such as West Berkshire and Wokingham. At the same time there has been an increase in young professionals moving to Reading for the job opportunities and nightlife that has in turn increased the demand for privately rented properties (currently twice the national average in Reading). In addition, there has been a commitment to ensure best use of land within the town centre. This has increased the profitability of flat developments and therefore developers have built more one and two bed flats than houses (in the last two years 90% of development in Reading has been flats). This has perpetuated the inward migration of single people and couples and the outward migration of families and older people.

Planning policy will be adapted as part of the review of the ‘Development Management Document’ and it is Reading Borough Council’s intention to require developers to build more two and three bed houses. It will also ensure that on large, non town centre development sites, a significant proportion of the provision are houses with private gardens. Developments need to be of reasonable density in order to ensure best use of land.

Appropriate regulation will be used in order to ensure that the infrastructure of the town is developed to support housing growth and to ensure that new developments conform to policy requirements and where possible, progress the strategic objectives of Reading Borough Council and partners. For example, new developments would need to adhere to and support Reading Borough Council’s Local Transport Plan 2006-11 and objectives of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Programme. The sustainable construction and design of new build properties, including measures to increase a property’s resilience to the effects of climate change, will be regulated and influenced to support the local authority in meeting targets within the Climate Change Strategy.

Planning policy will also be reviewed in relation to decreasing the threshold on which affordable housing provision will be requested. This will assist the authority in achieving a target of 40% of all new homes in the town to be affordable housing, with a target of 50% on all sites subject to a section 106 agreements and above 14 units. Please see Reading Borough Council’s Local Development Framework for details.

Mix between social rent and other types of affordable housing.

Due to the volatile housing market and changing economic climate it is difficult to predict the demand for shared ownership and intermediate rent over the next three to five years. The limitations on the availability of appropriate mortgage products has reduced the number of people able to buy shared ownership properties and the recent trend has indicated a preference for the “My Choice Homebuy” product which allows people to buy second hand market properties on a shared equity basis rather than new build. It is possible that demand for intermediate rent properties may

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46 Reading Borough Council (2006) – Local Transport Plan
47 Reading Borough Council (2009) – Climate Change Strategy 2008-13
increase due to the economic down-turn as those that would have previously aspired to home ownership or the private rented sector now look for a form of affordable housing. The demand for this product is still unclear and in the short term it will therefore be necessary for the local authority to remain flexible in relation to tenure mix on a development site when responding to housing need.

Analysis of the recent delivery of affordable housing shows a significant shift over the last two years towards the provision of intermediate tenures (predominantly shared ownership properties) and a decrease in social housing.

Please see the chart below, which indicates the tenure of recent completions of affordable housing in the Borough:

![Break down of Affordable Housing](chart)

The proportions of the type of affordable housing required by planning policy are being reviewed in recognition of the increased supply and decreased demand for shared ownership properties. Over the longer term Reading Borough Council intends to rebalance supply with a targeted split of 70% social rented housing and 30% intermediate tenures. This will be in accordance with the split in policies in the South East Plan. It also reflects the advice of the Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment48.

Key worker housing, which is housing aimed at a particular group of occupiers and not a particular form of tenure, will continue to be commissioned when appropriate.

48DTZ Consulting & research (2007) – Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment
Social Housing

It is acknowledged that there is a high demand for all sizes and types of units of social housing in Reading. There are currently 4858 households on the housing register.

Analysis of the housing register at the end of December 08 indicates that the largest percentages of households on the housing register are requesting 1 and 2 bed properties (49% and 34% respectively), which mirrors the information in the Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment. 49

However, there are a number of people who register that are not in any immediate housing need but apply in case of problems in the future. In addition, there are applicants that are entitled to a statutory duty from the Local Authority but are currently adequately housed. These households are placed in Priority Band F in line with the Choice Based Lettings Policy and are not considered a priority for re-housing.

Removal of band F from the analysis indicates less demand for one-bed properties and an increased demand for family-sized properties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bedroom size</th>
<th>All waiting list</th>
<th>A,B,C,D,E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table below shows the ratio of demand against the number of lets to that sized property. The biggest pressure is on properties that are four bedrooms or bigger. This pressure is accentuated when only the higher priority bands are analysed which indicates that a higher proportion of those most in need of re-housing require properties that have 4 bedrooms or more.

Ratio of need vs. number of properties let

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bedroom size</th>
<th>All list waiting</th>
<th>A,B,C,D,E</th>
<th>A,B,C,D</th>
<th>Bands A,B,C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.2:1</td>
<td>3.8:1</td>
<td>1.4:1</td>
<td>1.3:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.1:1</td>
<td>6.4:1</td>
<td>1.4:1</td>
<td>0.8:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.6:1</td>
<td>6.6:1</td>
<td>1.7:1</td>
<td>1.2:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+</td>
<td>12.6:1</td>
<td>5.3:1</td>
<td>4:1</td>
<td>2.6:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this data, it is clear that there is a need for large family-sized houses for social rent due to the low numbers of properties of that size that become available for let. In addition, information from Children’s Services

49 DTZ Consulting & research (2007) – Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment
50 Reading Borough Council (2008) – Allocations Policy
51 Reading Borough Council (2007) – Homechoice at Reading User Guide
52 Number of lets in 2007-2008 financial year. Demand from housing register as of Dec 2008
within the local authority suggests that many families waiting for larger, social rented properties have a number of additional support needs, which may make them less able to cope with overcrowding.

The delivery of larger units of accommodation for social rent will also increase the number of smaller properties available to let as transfers into larger properties are completed. Further analysis has been completed of the residents on the housing register requesting one-bed properties, which indicated a high number of older people and disabled adults on the Housing register. This is discussed in further detail in the ‘Specialist Client Groups’ section of this strategy.

Due to the change in legislation as a result of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008\(^{53}\), and in recognition of the significant challenges to delivering affordable housing in the current economic climate, all options for delivering affordable housing will be reviewed and initiated where appropriate.

**Strategic Objective 1 - Expected Outcomes:**

To ensure the sustainable delivery of new build housing to meet identified needs whilst achieving best use of available land we will:

- Increase the amount of new units of accommodation available in the borough
- Ensure local infrastructure supports new developments with clear links to Reading Borough Council’s *Local Transport Plan*\(^{54}\) and community development objectives
- Ensure sustainable construction and design of new build properties with clear links to Reading Borough Council’s *Climate Change Strategy*\(^{55}\) and Open Spaces Strategy\(^{56}\)
- Increase the amount of affordable housing in the borough
- Increase the supply of large size family units for social rent
- Investigate all mechanisms for delivering affordable housing within the town - this includes appraising options for new delivery vehicles including local Authority-led new build

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\(^{53}\) Office of Public Sector Information (2008) – *Housing and Regeneration Act 2008*

\(^{54}\) Reading Borough Council (2006) – *Local Transport Plan*

\(^{55}\) Reading Borough Council (2009) – *Climate Change Strategy 2008-13*

\(^{56}\) Reading Borough Council (2007) – *Open Spaces Strategy*
**Strategic Objective 2:**

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

**Strategic Objective 2 - Context:**

As stated above the demand on general need housing in Reading is high, but the local authority also needs to plan for the housing needs of specialist clients groups. An overarching priority for the borough is to increase the awareness and understanding of the different housing options for adults with a specialist need. This includes older people and adults with a disability, those who can pay for their own services (‘self-funders’) and those looking to purchase property. This will be completed in partnership with the delivery of the relevant community care strategies.

**Older people:**

*Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods: A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society* sets a clear vision for how we must prepare for our aging population both in physical provision and the reconnection of Housing, Health and Social Care services. The building design will be expected to change and this will become a mandatory part of the code for sustainable homes.

It is predicted that the number of older people in Reading will increase, but initially this growth will be in the age group of 60-79 with the number of people aged 80+ increasing after 2026.
Please see table below for detailed pattern of growth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2026</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>7000</td>
<td>8000</td>
<td>9000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>7000</td>
<td>8000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>7000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-79</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>6000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85-89</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>4000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Office of National Statistics indicates that at the time of the last census (2001) the breakdown in tenure for pensioners was:
- Owner Occupation - 71%
- Privately Renting - 7.6%
- Social rented - 21.4%

Projections of population growth of adults over 65 are lower in Reading than other Local Authorities in the South East. However, of those older people that remain in Reading, a disproportionate percentage will be on a low income.

The *Private Sector Homes Stock Condition Survey*\(^\text{58}\) also indicates a high number of older people living in poor condition private sector properties.

Analysis of the Housing Register\(^\text{59}\) indicated that 14% of the residents requesting a one-bed property on the Housing register were 65 years of age or above. This jumps to 24% if those over 55 are included. Please see Chart below for more detail:

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\(^{58}\) Reading Borough Council (2006) – *Private Sector House Condition Survey*

\(^{59}\) December 2008
Waiting list by age - 1 bed only

This pattern is again accentuated when only those in bands A-C are included with 33% being residents 65 or over and 52% being 55 or over. Please see chart below for more detail:

Waiting List (A-C) by age - 1 Bed

This has obvious implications for the type of one-bed accommodation required within the borough as social housing.
Equally, as both Government directions and the aspirations of older people are changing, many more people want to remain in their own home. The strategic development of adult care services accordingly places much more emphasis on independent living within the community and greater choice being offered to individuals. To support the aspirations of older residents and their families, RBC is therefore in the process of shifting the balance of care away from institutions.

In order to achieve this the Council has implemented a telecare strategy, has reviewed sheltered housing to ensure all provision is ‘fit for purpose’ and meets standards such as having accessible common parts and lifts, and has developed one new extra care housing scheme with a commitment to develop at least a further 240 units (two other schemes are already provided within the borough by a registered social landlord). A new ‘re-ablement’ service launched in 2009 brings together home care, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and other specialist services to provide short term intensive help for older people when returning home from hospital. The current supply and use of accommodation for older people, including Reading Borough Council owned sheltered accommodation and placements into residential care are presently under review.

**Disabled Adults**

**Public Service Agreement 16**

The Socially excluded adults’ public service agreement target (PSA 16 target) was announced in October 2007 as part of the Comprehensive Spending review, and as such is one of government’s top 30 priorities for 2007-10.

Evidence shows that without the firm foundations of a settled home and job, the most disadvantaged adults risk a lifetime of social exclusion for themselves and their children, and potentially place a lifetime cost on society. The government is committed to ensuring that socially excluded adults are offered the chance to get back on a path to a more integrated life, by increasing the proportion in settled accommodation and in employment.

The PSA focuses on four client groups who are particularly at risk of exclusion. While these groups can be highly vulnerable, they are also in contact with services that could and should make a difference. They are:

- Young adults leaving care
- Adult offenders under probation supervision
- Adults receiving secondary mental health services
- Adults with learning disabilities known to councils

© Communities and Local Government (2007) - *The New Framework for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships*
The needs of young adults leaving care and adult offenders are addressed in Reading Borough Council’s *Homelessness Strategy (2008-13)*. Key Priorities for Reading are the development of appropriate supported housing options for young people, including the commissioning of a supported lodging scheme by 2010, and the multi-agency development of an ‘Offenders Protocol’.

In line with the national strategy for people with Learning Disabilities *Valuing People Now*, Reading Borough Council is committed to all people with learning disabilities and their families have an informed choice about where, and with whom they live. There is a local commitment to making mainstream housing policies more inclusive of people with learning disabilities in line with national aspirations. Although *Valuing People Now* is a strategy for adults with a learning disability, many of the principles are relevant for clients with mental health issues or a physical disability in respect to accommodation.

There is a clear expectation that there will be a shift away from residential care towards supported living across all tenures. This does not mean housing without support but rather those adults who need accommodation support are offered a tailored care package designed to maximise their independence and integration into the local community. In addition to specific supported living placements, a number of disabled adults live in General Needs accommodation with floating support. Increasing the proportion of adults with learning disabilities living in settled accommodation (which does not included residential care or NHS campuses) is a delivery priority for the Government and for Reading Borough Council. Therefore it is necessary for us to increase the number of Supported Living Placements available for disabled adults.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Group</th>
<th>Residential and Nursing Placement</th>
<th>Supported Living Placements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In accordance with the recommended actions for local authorities in *Valuing People now*, Reading Borough Council is committed to reviewing and updating the *Joint Strategic Needs Assessment* in partnership with Wokingham and West Berkshire councils. In addition measures are already in place to ensure more people are receiving personal budgets and *Direct*...
Payments’ to increase their choice of where they live and with whom. Care Managers’ knowledge of all housing options including home ownership and assured tenancies is being developed and will continue to be a priority. Equally, work with people still living with families to ensure this is their desired option, plans for those living with elderly carers and Transition Plans will stay a focus for Reading Borough Council so that future accommodation choices for individuals can be met and appropriate services commissioned.

To ensure that robust projections of need underpin commissioning plans, a review will be completed to evaluate the process of projecting the housing needs of disabled adults in partnership with both Community Care and the Directorate of Education and Children’s services.

Often disabled adults looking for rented accommodation apply to the Council for social rented accommodation. Analysis of the Housing Register indicates that of bands A-E, 25% of households are requesting a property on medical grounds; this rises to 30% when only a one-bed need is reviewed. However, only 183 (6.5% of housing register bands A-E) households listed with a medical need also list a specific special circumstance. The breakdown is as follows:\(^5\):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical need - special circumstance listed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobility Problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheel Chair access needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total, 90 of those with a specified medical need on the Housing Register have mobility problems, while 103 households on the Housing Register are currently requesting a property that is wheelchair accessible - with 84 in bands A-E and 74 in bands A-C. Of those requesting wheelchair access in bands A-E, the property size requested is predominately one and two-bed:

\(^5\) Figures accurate as of April 2009
Wheelchair access by bedroom size (Bands A-E)

A comparison of the number of properties let to households requesting a property that is wheelchair accessible indicates that the ratio of demand to let is higher for one-bed property. Of those in Bands to A-C requesting a one bed, those requesting a wheelchair accessible property represent 12.7% of the Housing Register.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bed size</th>
<th>Number on H/R</th>
<th>Number allocated to in 08/09</th>
<th>Ratio of demand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.4:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.9:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.6:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore there is a clear need for an increase in the number of wheelchair accessible properties available for social rent. Planning policy will also be reviewed to ensure that it supports the delivery of both wheelchair adapted properties and the ‘Lifetime Homes’ standard throughout the town.

66 Figures accurate as of April 2009
Strategic objective 2 - Expected Outcomes

To increase the availability of appropriate specialist accommodation for those that need it we will:

- Improve access to appropriate accommodation for homelessness clients - as detailed in Reading Borough Council’s Homelessness Strategy (2008-2014)⁶⁷
- Increase choice and availability of appropriate accommodation for our aging population.
- Increase the availability of accommodation for tenants with a specialised need, in line with the relevant Community Care and Children and Young People strategies.

Strategic Objective 3:

Make best use of existing housing stock within the town.

Strategic Objective 3 - Context:

The supply of appropriate housing in the borough is not only focused on sustainable delivery of new build properties. It is also necessary to maximise the use of existing properties in the borough to ensure that local residents’ needs are being met.

Private Rented Sector (PRS)

The PRS, and individual properties within it, can have a significant impact on a community. Managed effectively, both strategically and operationally it can make a number of contributions - from increasing the choice of housing options for all sections of society, through to the delivery of economic prosperity and achievements of local authority environmental objectives.

Nationally, the PRS is a complex market featuring a number of distinct sub-markets, all of which are reflected within Reading. These sub-markets include:

- Young professionals
- Students
- Housing Benefit claimants
- Slum rentals
- Tied housing
- High-income renters
- Immigrants
- Asylum seekers
- Temporary accommodation
- Regulated tenancies (this is a dwindling proportion of the market, predominantly tenancies that were formulated before January 1989)

Maximising the use of the PRS can increase the choice and supply of housing for many residents. In Reading, as mirrored nationally, we are seeing an increased number of barriers to accessing social housing and owner occupation so the role of the PRS is becoming increasingly critical as a mechanism for residents to acquire appropriate accommodation. Recent analysis of Council Tax data indicated that 27% of households in Reading were privately renting and in 2006, 18% of households in the PRS were in receipt of Housing Benefit.

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69 Reading Borough Council (2006) – Private Sector House Condition Survey
In addition to meeting the needs of those who are unable to buy or choose not to buy, the PRS also provides the following benefits to the housing market:

- Flexibility for people needing to move quickly or who wish to only stay for a short period of time
- Simpler process for those wishing to move long distances
- Easier route into house-share compared with social housing or owner occupation
- Limited restrictions for access
- Opportunities for migration to the area
- Enables people to reside in an area while preparing to move into home ownership
- Support for individuals wanting to invest in properties in order to make provisions for the future

The current challenge for Reading Borough Council is to sufficiently develop the Private Rented Sector to ensure that these positive contributions are developed further over the next three to five years and negative elements are managed and reduced.

**Deposit Guarantee Scheme**

Reading Borough Council proactively utilises the PRS as a tool to prevent homelessness by supporting those threatened with losing their home to secure a rented property from a private landlord via the Deposit Guarantee Scheme (DGS). In 2007/2008 the DGS facilitated 248 households on a low income into the PRS and there were a total of 319 households on the DGS on the 1st April 2008. It is currently estimated that over 100 landlords are registered on the scheme.

Links with homeless hostels in the borough will be strengthened in order to facilitate moves into more settled accommodation for homeless clients, as will the links to energy efficiency initiatives in the town. In addition, the option of advertising large PRS properties not required for the DGS through our Choice-Based Lettings scheme will be reviewed. This may provide an additional option for people on the housing waiting list whose needs may not fall within the high band for social housing and who may therefore choose to move in to the PRS.

Although landlords are offering additional properties to the DGS there is still a shortage of one-bed properties available with a short fall of 30 properties to meet the demand identified between August and December 2008. Often those who require a one-bed property have additional needs and it is a priority within the Homelessness Strategy to develop a ‘Rent Deposit Scheme’ for single people delivered by a specialist housing provider. Increased access to the PRS will in turn reduce reliance on social rented properties to enable ‘move-on’ and would result in additional hostel places.
being available. Please see Reading Borough Council’s *Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013*³⁰ for details.

**Empty Homes**

For the purposes of this Strategy, our definition of a long-term empty home is:

“A private sector property that has been unoccupied for at least six months”.

Reading Borough Council has a live *Empty Homes Strategy*³¹ in place. The aim of this Strategy is to contribute towards creating sustainable communities, by bringing back into use empty homes for the benefit of local residents, the local economy and the wider community. It is widely recognised that bringing empty homes back into use can contribute to meeting the demand for housing and the reduction of anti-social behaviour and public health nuisance. Increasing the number of empty properties brought back in to use by council intervention continues to be a priority for Reading Borough Council.

The Empty Homes Strategy has three strategic objectives:

- To identify empty homes and understand the reasons why they become and remain empty
- To work with property owners to bring empty homes back into use
- To minimise the impact of empty homes on the community through the appropriate use of statutory and discretionary enforcement powers

While it is important to bring all empty properties back into use, the Council recognises that some homes cause greater concern than others. In order to maximise the effectiveness of limited resources, we must prioritise intervention.

Actions are prioritised according to the Empty Homes Scoring Matrix, which takes into account specific factors about the property. This includes the strategic location e.g. situated on a gateway route to Reading or area of significant deprivation in the Town Centre; engagement with the owner; management standard; impact upon neighbouring properties.

A dedicated Private Sector Housing Initiatives Officer will provide a key resource to deliver the strategy and complete the following activities:

- Develop and maintain an Empty Homes Database

³⁰ Reading Borough Council (2008) – *Homelessness Strategy 2008-13*
³¹ Reading Borough Council (2008) – *Empty Homes Strategy 2008-11*
- Work in partnership with the Police, Fire Service and other stakeholders to encourage reporting of empty homes
- Co-ordinate intervention to make derelict and insecure empty homes safe and secure - minimising opportunity for vandalism, arson, and anti-social behaviour
- Identify empty homes and engage owners
- Offer free advice, information and assistance to property owners to realise the full potential of their properties to bring them back into use
- Work with RSL partners in finding remedies to bring empty private sector homes back into use

Reading Borough Council also offers a non-repayable grant funding of up to £10,000 to owners of empty properties to bring them back into use. The grant is awarded on the condition that the owner will provide the accommodation to tenants from the housing register for a period of 5 years.

The Council will also work with Registered Social Landlord partners to investigate options for purchase or leasing of private sector empty properties - securing investment to renovate empty homes and letting these to people in need of affordable homes. Private sector leasing schemes aim to remove the worry for an owner of letting their property by arranging for a Housing Association to lease the property for a fixed and usually longer period. The owner will receive a guaranteed rent, while the Housing Association takes on management responsibilities and arranges for major repairs or improvements.

Please see Reading’s Empty Homes Strategy 2008-2011\(^\text{72}\) for further details.

### Social Housing

As stated above one of the biggest pressures on social housing is in relation to large family units of accommodation. This need cannot be met only via the delivery of new build units; creative approaches are necessary to meet this need. It is proposed that this issue should be managed from three angles:
- Tackling under occupation in our stock
- Approaching households on the waiting list requiring large family units on a case-by-case basis to assess other options to reduce over-crowding. For example, assisting adult dependants into their own tenancy
- Assessing a household’s current property for practical measures to increase space and reduce over-crowding

It is estimated that 26% (35) of Local Authority-owned four-bed properties are under occupied and in the last three years, only 19 under occupied properties have been released via a transfer to a smaller property.

\(^\text{72}\) Ibid
Therefore Reading Borough Council is reviewing the incentives and approach to reducing under occupation.

As part of the ‘Releasing Larger Homes Tasks Force’, Reading Borough Council has been able to draw on the experiences and best practice of other local authorities in the country, which will influence a cross-departmental review of the current under-occupiers policy.

As stated above there are a high number of households on the Housing Register requesting wheelchair-adapted properties. There are also a number of households requesting property adaptations for other reasons. The local authority completes adaptations but they are often at high cost to the Housing Revenue Account. It is important that the Council makes best use of adapted properties when they become available to be let to a new tenant. Please see Objective 4 for further detail on the Disabled Facilities Grant process.

**Strategic Objective 3 - Expected Outcomes:**

To make best use of existing housing stock within the town we will:

- Increase the use of housing options across all tenures for those on a low income, reducing a reliance on social housing
- Increase the number of empty properties brought back into use through Council intervention
- Ensure all options are considered to reduce the number of overcrowded and under occupied households in social housing
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.*

Strategic Objective 4 - Context:

It has long been recognised that there are links between poor housing and poor health, and the *Housing Act 2004* brought in legislation to ensure local authorities tackled the worst properties within their boundaries. Cold and damp properties can lead to a number of health conditions and can be caused by poor maintenance of the building, ineffectual heating systems, fuel poverty or a combination of all these factors. The risk of trips, falls and fires increase with poorly maintained properties and reducing this risk could in turn reduce avoidable hospital admissions, injuries and deaths. Fall prevention is particularly important in maintaining the independence and safety of older people in the home. Preventing an elderly person from falling could eliminate a hospital admission and a potential move into supported living for a resident previously living independently.

What is a ‘Decent Home’?

In order to be decent a home should be warm, weatherproof and have reasonably modern facilities.

A detailed definition of a decent home was set in 2001 by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and updated in 2006 by the Department of Communities and Local Government, to ensure that all Social Landlords work to the same goal.

The same definition is used to measure the condition of the private sector with properties being assessed via the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). Any property assessed to have one or more Category 1 hazards cannot be classed as ‘decent’.

Reading Borough Council Properties

Reading Borough Council has clear information about the condition of stock that it owns as a result of a survey completed by professional surveyor, King Sturge, in 2004. This survey set the baseline position for 30-year capital improvement works.

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73 Office of Public Sector Information (2004)- *Housing Act 2004*
75 Department of Communities and Local Government (2006) – *A Decent Home, Definition and Guidance for Implementation*
76 Office of Public Sector Information (2004) - *Housing Act 2004*
investment needs and influenced the *Decent Homes Strategy* set out in the *Housing Improvement Plan 2004*\(^{77}\). Since then, clear progress has been made in both reviewing stock needs and consulting with tenants.

**Reading Private Finance Initiative (PFI)**

In 2006 Reading Borough Council completed one of the first PFI’s in respect to general needs housing in the country.

A quarter of the Local Authority-owned stock is maintained and improved via a PFI partnering contract managed over a 30-year period by a private sector consortium. This has provided Reading Borough Council the opportunity to consolidate its approach to the remaining stock. The PFI contract involved the refurbishment of the stock to meet Decent Homes Standard Plus, incorporating enhancements such as new windows and doors, better insulation, energy efficient boilers, upgraded electrics, thermostat implementation and radiator valves. These works have been completed nine months ahead of schedule and Affinity (Reading) Ltd. will be responsible for ongoing maintenance and repair of this stock for the remaining 25 years of the contract. The initiative has reduced maintenance costs and increased the life of the Council’s assets. Tenants have benefit from better quality, more energy-efficient and more secure homes.

Following the 2004 survey, newly arising repair needs caused by aging building elements are also monitored and 85% of all stock has now been inspected. This enables a one, five and 30-year business plan to be developed in order to ensure that all Council-owned stock reaches the Decent Homes Standard Plus by 2010/11 and is maintained at this level.

Reading Borough Council expects to meet the Government’s 2010/11 Decent Homes Standard and through tenant involvement, has incorporated ‘Housing Plus’ improvements linked to Decent Homes targets. The *HRA Business Plan*\(^{78}\), due to be refreshed in summer 2009, provides a complete strategy to maintaining the Council’s stock for the next 30 years. It is also recognised that stock improvement should not be delivered in isolation from estate improvements and neighbourhood management and therefore the programme of work is reflected in the ‘Neighbourhood Management Action Plans’ held by Reading Borough Council’s Landlord Services as a summary of all relevant activity taking place on an estate.

\(^{77}\) Reading Borough Council 2004 – *Housing Improvement Plan*

\(^{78}\) Reading Borough Council (2004) – *Housing Revenue Account Business Plan*
Registered Social Landlord Properties

Due to the age of the majority of Registered Social Landlord properties in Reading, the condition of their stock is not a concern and is in line to meet the Decent Home’s target.

Private Sector

Private sector housing (owner occupied and privately rented) represents 83.1% of the dwellings in Reading. In 2006, Reading Borough Council commissioned a *Private Sector House Condition Survey*\(^79\) to provide a clear evidence base as to the issues faced by this sector in Reading. Key facts from this survey are as follows:

- Reading has a higher number of properties built before 1919 compared with the national average (33.3% in comparison to 24.4%)
- 62.1% of the PRS were constructed pre 1919, which compares to 33.3% of all dwellings in the borough, highlighting the disproportionate number of older properties being used as PRS accommodation
- 40.2% of private sector stock is classed as non-decent (national average 30.2%)
- 57% of PRS in Reading is classed as non-decent (national average 47.5%)
- 90.7% of converted flats (private rented stock) are classed as non-decent with the next highest non-decent tenure type being low-rise purpose built flats
- 56% of properties that are classed as non-decent fail due to thermal discomfort - this equals 22.5% of overall stock
- 25.8% of non-decent properties have category 1 hazards, for example ‘excess cold’
- 18% of households living in the PRS are on Housing Benefit and occupy a disproportionate amount of non-decent properties
- Non-decent properties are associated with heads of households that are under 24 or over 60, especially those above 85

The Council is under no obligation to fund all of this work necessary to improve all properties in the town, and can also facilitate improvements through a range of mechanisms and incentives including enforcement action, advice, improvement grants and loans, and referrals to initiatives run by external agencies. This includes, but is not limited to, ‘HeatSeekers’\(^80\), which is a ‘Carbon Emission Reduction Target (CERT)’ funded schemes, and ‘Warm Front’\(^81\) funded by central government.

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\(^79\) Reading Borough Council (2006) – *Private Sector House Condition Survey*

\(^80\) [http://www.homeheatseekers.co.uk/](http://www.homeheatseekers.co.uk/)

\(^81\) [http://www.warmfront.co.uk/](http://www.warmfront.co.uk/)
The age profile of those living in non-decent properties has not been greatly affected by recent migration patterns, which indicate that more young people, often young professionals, are moving to the town and older people are migrating out of the town. Young professionals renting privately occupy more of the recent new build properties that have been purchased as a buy-to-let. Families and older people moving out of the town tend to be more affluent residents. This is leading to a disproportionate number of older and more vulnerable adults occupying the poor quality housing in the Borough.

Rates of non-decency are highest in the central and east central areas, where the highest proportion of privately rented properties is concentrated. It is also worth noting that this area has the highest BME population in the town. The Reading BME Housing and Related Needs Study\textsuperscript{82} completed in 2006 indicates that information should be provided to the BME communities in relation to home improvement support.

Reading Borough Council’s approach to improving property condition in the private sector has a dual approach of support and enforcement.

**Supporting people to stay safe and secure in their homes**

For many residents, their preferred housing option is to remain in their home and Reading Borough Council is committed to supporting people to exercise this choice while staying safe, healthy and secure.

The Private Sector Renewal Team based within the Housing and Public Health Team implement the Private Sector Renewal Policy\textsuperscript{83} for owner-occupiers, tenants and landlords within the PRS.

The policy objectives are:

- To target assistance in order to reduce the number of households living in non-decent homes through Decent Homes Grants
- To have a clear and transparent grants policy, that ensures available grant funds are targeted to those people in the community that are in the greatest need
- To utilise the Housing, Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS) as a hazard assessment tool to prioritise action, make homes safer and reduce accidents and in this way achieving the Decent Home Standard
- To contribute to the regeneration of the Borough’s housing stock and prevent further deterioration by encouraging improvements and repairs
- To improve the thermal efficiency and reduce both energy usage and living costs of dwellings throughout the Borough and to remove households from fuel poverty

\textsuperscript{82}Andy Steele Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit University of Salford (2006), - Reading Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) Housing & Related Needs Study

\textsuperscript{83} Reading Borough Council (2007) - Reading Borough Council Housing Renewal Policy (Private Sector)
Where grant funding is not available to provide details of the equity release loans offered by the House Proud scheme, which is operated via the Home Improvement Trust.  

The Private Sector Renewal Policy will be reviewed to reflect recent changes to national and local policy including the potential for sub-regional loan scheme for landlords and a shift towards repayable loans at the point that a property is sold rather than grants for those may be asset rich but have limited finance available to them.

In addition to the Empty Homes Grants discussed previously, the grants available via the Private Sector Renewal Policy are:

- Landlord and Owner Occupier Decent Homes Grants
- Small Repairs Grants
  - Loan set up costs (Houseproud)
  - Energy Efficiency
  - Urgent works affecting Health and Safety
  - Hospital Discharge
- Mandatory and Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants

The above grants are delivered by a Home Improvement Agency, which are small not for profit organisations normally managed by Housing Associations, Charities, Local Authorities or in some circumstances, local management committees. Their function is to help older people, disabled people, or people on low incomes, improve, repair, maintain or adapt their homes.

The Government sees Home Improvement Agencies as being important to a wide range of national policies and client groups. Key policy drivers include the ‘Independence, well-being and choice’ theme within the Department of Health white paper, Our Health, our Care, our Say, relating to preventing hospital admissions and helping people to live independently for longer. Home Improvement Agencies are also a key delivery vehicle for policies relating to Decent Homes in the Private Sector.

**Best Practice Award**

In partnership with two other Berkshire Authorities, Reading Borough Council has appointed Ridgeway as the Home Improvement Agency for the area. The Commissioning Partnership won the award for the ‘Best Approach to Commissioning of HIA Services’ having entered the Foundations HIA awards 2008. The Partnership comprises the first Unitary Authorities in the country to have jointly commissioned a Home Improvement Agency. The judging panel commended the innovative approach to commissioning the HIA services, overcoming the challenges to cross-authority working and for realising the opportunities of such a move.

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84 Ibid
85 Department of Health (2006) - Our health, our care, our say: a new direction for community services
The budget for ‘Decent Homes’, ‘Empty Homes’ and ‘Small Repair’ grants and assistance under the private sector renewal policy is £500k for the financial year 09/10 with running costs, predominantly officer time, included in this budget. This will enable Reading Borough Council to improve approximately 40 homes and the budget will be reviewed annually.

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) are available to assist a disabled person in gaining access to and from, and in and around, their dwelling and must be provided by the Council if a tenant is eligible and the works are necessary and appropriate. In addition, Discretionary Disabled Facilities grant assistance is available to fund works to make a dwelling suitable for the accommodation, welfare or employment of a disabled person (Welfare and Employment Grant) or if the Council decides to assist with the cost of work mandatory in nature but in excess of the grant limit for mandatory assistance (Top Up Grants).

The 2009/10 budgets for DFGs are £635K on Local Authority properties (HRA funded) and £310K for private sector properties. In order to ensure the most beneficial outcomes are being achieved for residents, a review of the complete DFG process will be completed. This will included a consideration of options for recycling already adapted properties, the approach taken by different teams involved and the investigation of alternative housing options for those who require large-scale adaptations.

Handihelp Scheme

Ridgeway also delivers a handy-person service for the borough, which will assist residents over 60 or those on income-related benefits. The Ridgeway Handihelp service, managed under the Social Enterprise model, delivers a comprehensive maintenance and minor adaptations service for older or vulnerable residents. The tasks completed by the Handihelp service include, but are not limited to:

- Small building repairs, minor adaptations or odd jobs such as putting up curtain rails or shelves;
- Falls/accident prevention checks with remedial action such as securing loose carpets and putting up grab rails;
- Security checks with remedial action such as installing locks, chains and spy holes;
- Small home energy efficiency measures such as installing low-energy light bulbs and replacing appliances;
- Fire safety measures such as the installation of smoke alarms, electric blanket check and chip pan/fat fryer exchange.

The service operates within a Quality Assurance Framework as guided by Supporting People and has clear links to improving sustainable hospital discharge and will refer to other services within the Health Service and Adult Social Care.
Although the Handihelp Service will not complete landlord functions, it will assist people that are privately renting and that are struggling to maintain their properties, to do minor works such as change light bulbs and tack down carpets.

The Handihelp service is an important mechanism for delivering Reading Borough Council’s preventative agenda. The prevention of trips and falls and health issues relating to poor living environments continues to be an area of focus for Reading Borough Council. A successful bid has enabled an increase in funding for the Handiperson service of £50K for 2009/10 and 70K 2010/11 that will be used to further progress this agenda. This will enable an increase in budget for the traditional ‘Handihelp’ service, and increased publicity.
Fuel Poverty/ Energy Efficiency

In 2006, it was estimated that 11% of dwellings were in fuel poverty in the Reading area\(^{86}\), which is line with the national average. This percentage is now likely to be higher, exacerbated by the recent ‘credit crunch’ and rise in fuel prices. As stated above, some residents can receive grant support for tackling problems causing poor thermal comfort via the Private Sector Renewal Team. However, in addition there three major schemes operating to improve the thermal efficiency of properties.

**Heatseekers\(^{87}\)**

Reading Borough Council is delivering ‘Heatseekers’ in conjunction with the Energy Saving Partnership, thanks to funding from the Government’s Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) programme. The Reading-based Heatseekers scheme has received national coverage in the Guardian newspaper and on Sky news, and has been cited as national best practice by Ed Miliband MP the Energy and Climate Change Secretary.

Heat seeking thermal imaging technology is used to identify private sector homes that lack cavity wall and/or loft insulation and are subsequently ‘leaking’ heat. Insulation is a very cost effective way to significantly reduce the amount of energy needed to heat a home. The ‘Heatseekers’ vehicle is capable of assessing over 1,000 properties an hour by surveying on the move and automatically assesses the insulation condition of each property. A dedicated team of highly trained advisors then follow up with face-to-face advice for interested householders based on the thermal image of their home. Insulation installation can be arranged there and then.

Residents on means-tested benefits or who are over 70 years of age are eligible for free insulation under the scheme. All other householders will receive a substantial discount on the normal retail price.

The thermal imaging across Reading has been completed and house visits to show householders their images commenced in Spring 2009. As of March 2009, before house visits commenced, the scheme has already received 107 referrals from able-to-pay customers and 141 priority group referrals since October 2008. It is expected that 5000 improvements will be made to homes by 2012.

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\(^{86}\) Reading Borough Council (2006) – *Private Sector House Condition Survey*

\(^{87}\) [http://www.homeheatseekers.co.uk/](http://www.homeheatseekers.co.uk/)
**Warm Front**

Warm Front allows vulnerable occupiers to apply for a grant from EAGA, a provider of residential energy efficiency solutions, of up to £2700 per property. Under the Local Area Agreement, 250 homes will be improved through a Warm Front grant at minimal cost to the Council.

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**The Greener Warmer Safer Project**

New Growth Points funding supported a 2007/8 “Greener, Warmer, Safer” homes initiative on the Dee Park Estate, an area of deprivation identified within the town. The scheme aims to improve the sustainability of homes across tenures through undertaking home audits and arranging small scale, low-cost upgrades to improve safety, security and energy, waste and water efficiency. The premise of the project is that making a difference to homes and lifestyles need not be costly. Many minor changes can bring about lasting change if delivered with a multi-agency approach and when tied in to other improvements, initiatives and bids. A range of improvements are offered with free provision and practical installation of basic energy efficiency and safety measures, plus advice and help for home owners and tenants to apply for grants, loans and other sources of assistance.

A range of partners contribute to the project including Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, Thames Water, Thames Valley Police, Thames Energy and Age Concern and experienced tradesman under the supervision of a specially recruited Sustainable Homes Officer. Benefits of this project include reduced fuel consumption and emissions (environmental impact), reduction in fuel poverty and health benefits from warmer, safer and more secure homes.

In April 2008, Cabinet agreed a framework for the allocation of New Growth Points funding 2008/9 - 2010/11. Funding has been allocated to continue and extend the Greener, Warmer, Safer scheme to other priority areas in Reading selected on the basis of being both low in thermal comfort and areas of Multiple Deprivation.

Fuel poverty needs to be challenged from three main directions: improving the physical condition of a property (better insulation and improved heating systems), ensuring that a resident is maximising their income, often via the benefits system (Winter Fuel Payments etc) and education regarding behavioural change that may reduce fuel use. The proportion of households containing someone on income related benefits that occupies either a dwelling with a SAP less than 35 or greater than 65 is monitored as a proxy of fuel poverty. The desired effect over time will be to observe a decrease in the proportion with a SAP less than 35 and an increase in the proportion with a SAP greater than 65. In addition to the health benefits to residents,
these improvements will also help to reduce carbon emissions, linking to a separate LAA target and the *Climate Changes Strategy 2008-13*[^89]. The Council plans to build on current initiatives and will publish a Fuel Poverty Strategy, which will outline the future actions to support this agenda.

**Enforcement in the private rented sector**

Reading Borough Council is committed to investigating complaints relating to poor quality housing in the PRS and take enforcement action when appropriate. This is required in cases where there is single occupancy and where properties are classed as ‘Houses of Multiple Occupation’ (HMO). As stated above Reading has a disproportionate number of HMO in comparison to the national average and there are also higher rates of non-decency in this type of property.

**Licensing:**

The aim of HMO licensing is to ensure that the poorest and highest risk properties in the private rental market meet the legal standards and are properly managed. Please see Reading Borough Council’s *Policy for Housing Standards Regulation including Houses of Multiple Occupation*[^90] for full details of the licensing process.

Following licensing, HMO will be prioritised by means of a risk-based assessment. Properties that are deemed to be high-risk will be inspected first. This means that the properties may have been assessed as having poor management systems, inadequate fire protection or a poor history of compliance. There is a strong correlation with those properties that have a high-risk rating and the requirement for enforcement action.

The owner must deal with all Category 1 hazards within five years of the licence being granted. If they do not, then the Council is expected to use its enforcement powers to improve the property. Applicants will be informed of this requirement when the licence is issued and information will be made available to help them identify and deal with hazards.

There have been 560 HMO licenses issued to date; however there are an estimated 200 that remain unlicensed in the town. Increasing the number of HMO licensed and completing follow up inspections is a key area of growth for Reading Borough Council. Additional Resources have been allocated to the teams responsible in order to deliver this objective.

[^89]: Reading Borough Council (2009) – *Climate Change Strategy 2008-2013*
[^90]: Reading Borough Council (1997) - *Policy for Housing Standards Regulation including Houses of Multiple Occupation*
Strategic Objective 4 - Expected Outcomes:

To increase the number of properties meeting the ‘Decent Homes Standard’ in all tenures, and support people to stay safe and comfortable in their homes, we will:

- Ensure that all Council-owned properties meet a ‘Decent Homes Plus’ standard by the end of financial year 2010/11 and that this standard is maintained
- Reduce the number of poor quality properties in the private sector
- Increase the prevention activities to reduce accidents and hazards in the home, with a focus on older or vulnerable residents
- Ensure that the Disabled Facilities Grant process is achieving the best outcome for clients and is delivered in line with value for money objectives
- Reduce fuel poverty and carbon emissions from properties in the town
Strategic Objective 5

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

Strategic Objective 5 - Context:

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 ASB and vandalism in an area 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.

Dee Park Regeneration Project

The Dee Park Regeneration project reflects Reading Borough Council’s ambitions for urban renaissance - creating a quality environment for all.

The Dee Park estate is an area requiring renewal and has been prioritised for regeneration by the Council. Relying on community-focused partnerships, the regeneration of Dee Park covers every theme in the Council’s Community Strategy, seeking to address the problems created by the current built environment as well as addressing access to services and facilities on the estate including health care, education, training and support. The regeneration will address connectivity and physical barriers to integration; improve the quality and usability of open space; and thereby continue to tackle anti-social behaviour and crime.

The proposals for the physical renewal of the estate have been developed through engagement with the private sector via the Competitive Dialogue procurement process. This process has been coupled with extensive consultation with residents focused through a Community Regeneration Action Group (CRAG), which has itself received support and capacity building to enable it to add genuine value to the process.

The chosen scheme will regenerate Dee Park by creating a lively central area, increasing density and improving the design and mix of housing on the estate, together with other estate-wide environmental and community enhancements. The regeneration aims to better integrate Dee Park into its surroundings by leaving an enduring legacy of quality housing and public spaces coupled with excellent access to locally-based, well-targeted services.
Private sector

Communities can be significantly affected by a change in the tenure make-up of an area, for example an increase of HMO in an area can impact on the both the number and type of amenities, the levels of anti-social behaviour in an area and place pressure on the availability of parking spaces.

The conversion of properties into HMO where the accommodation comprises separate dwellings or where the occupants are not living communally can require planning permission. Equally, planning permission is required to convert any single dwelling into flats. In addition to decisions based on the merit of individual cases, this provides an opportunity to consider the impact of this conversion on the surrounding area, including the number of conversions already in a neighbourhood.

The Planning Department receives complaints regarding the unauthorised conversion of properties to flats and HMO. Complaints are investigated and further action is taken when it is appropriate and expedient in planning terms, i.e. when it is clear that planning permission is required, that harm is being caused and that the conversion would not receive planning permission. In response to the increasing pressure on the planning enforcement service, both externally and from increasing work on HMO and Empty Homes, Housing and Planning Delivery Grants will be used to fund additional enforcement resources over a two-year period in both Planning and Legal services.

In specific circumstances the local Planning Authority has legislative powers to take action against an owner if land or a building is deemed to be adversely affecting the amenity of an area, requiring the situation to be remedied. This legislation will be considered in partnership with other departments within the local authority, as one option within the corporate toolkit for challenging unsightly properties.

A cross-service “Environment Enforcement Group” will also be established to co-ordinate and prioritise action for enforcement against problematic properties in the town; this will include empty properties.

Social Housing Sector

Over the past few years, Reading Borough Council’s Housing Service has successfully placed considerable emphasis on achieving the Decent Homes Standard and substantial funding has been channelled into improving properties. However, less funding has been available to improve the more general external estate areas. As a result, a number of estate areas are beginning to look worn and in need of modernisation. This issue is increasingly reflected in feedback from local residents and is highlighted as a concern in the Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2008.

In order to address this issue 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. The new Decent Neighbourhood Fund will have a budget of £375,000. In addition, the Housing Service currently contributes £100,000 to the Tenant Improvement Fund (TIF), which is designed to make small-scale improvements to estate areas. This funding will continue but will run in parallel to the new Decent Neighbourhood Fund.

This creates a combined budget of £475,000 in the 2009/10 financial year and this figure will be reviewed via the annual budget-setting process. Other sources of funding are also potentially available from the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and bids can be made to support specific estate projects.

The Reading Federation of Tenant and Resident Associations and the Joint Consultative Committee will work with the Housing Service to agree a process to prioritise the areas/neighbourhoods that will benefit from the fund and decide on the most suitable action for specific areas.

It is suggested that initially the priority neighbourhoods (equally 70% of the budget) should mirror those identified as Thriving Neighbourhood areas. These have already been identified as areas of multiple deprivation and predominantly overlay with Reading Borough Council-owned estate areas. Housing is already working closely with the Thriving Neighbourhoods Team to improve the quality of life for residents in those areas. Please see Objective 9 for further detail on the Thriving Neighbourhoods Programme.

It is envisaged the fund will cover a broad range of environmental issues designed to improve the appearance and quality of life of those living in a neighbourhood. For example:
- Landscaping
- Fencing
- Painting
- Brickwork/Pavements
- Lighting (improving existing or providing new)
- Provision of new parking bays
- Marking out of existing parking bays to make them more effective
- Road signage, block signs, estate maps - securing grass verges.
- Notice boards
- Improvement to block communal garden areas
- Improved street furniture

The aim would be to ensure all works use environmentally friendly sustainable materials and technology.

There is also potential for part of the funding to be used as a contribution towards enhancing a local service for a period of time to make necessary improvements. Examples may include:
- Funding for warden presence on an estate
- Funding for provision of a Park Ranger
Contribute to funding of events at the local Youth & Community centre.

The Housing Service will work in partnership with other Registered Social Landlords in areas where Housing Association properties border or are located on RBC estate areas. Strategically, this will be taken forward via Reading Borough Council’s Housing Management forum and regular meetings with the preferred joint commissioning partners.

Reading Borough Council will also be completing an Estates Capacity Study, a comprehensive study of our housing estates to look at opportunities for upgrading, remodelling and densification to provide the basis of a long-term prioritised programme of estate renewal. This project will:

- Identify development opportunities in terms of infill, intensification, vacant plots
- Consider needs in terms of housing, economic and community development, transport, the environment, and employment initiatives - taking a holistic view of infrastructure and regeneration issues for neighbourhoods
- Consider the possibilities of increasing the density and mix in housing tenure
- Consider the sale of land for private residential development to cross fund community facilities, environment, social housing and infrastructure

Strategic Objective 5 - Expected Outcomes:

To improve and maintain standards of neighbourhoods and identify areas for neighbourhood renewal we will:

- Reduce the adverse effect on the amenity of private sector properties
- Improve the condition of external areas on social housing estates
- Regenerate areas of the town where necessary and viable
**Housing Services: ‘Housing is more than bricks and mortar’**

**Strategic Objective 6**

*Ensure strong neighbourhood management across all housing sectors*

**Strategic Objective 6 - Context:**

Representatives of the Housing Service, both operationally and strategically, are active members of the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. The strategic direction of the partnership is set out in the *Community Safety Plan 2008*[^91] and delivery is monitored via the associated Local Area Agreement targets.

The aim of the Safer Reading Partnership is to:

“Continue to make Reading a safer place for those who live, work and visit here through a reduction in crime and disorder.”

This will be achieved through:

- Discouraging and preventing criminal and anti-social behaviour
- Reducing the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour
- Tackling drugs and alcohol-related criminality through enforcement and treatment

It is recognised that Housing has a key role in supporting the delivery of the Community Safety Plan and that within it there were three strategic priorities were identified as having an overlap with the strategic objectives of the Housing Strategy.

**Acquisitive and Violent Crime**

There is clear emphasis on acquisitive crimes that are associated with substance misuse - notably burglary, robbery, and theft from a person and theft from a vehicle - and with violent crimes including domestic violence and abuse. Domestic violence is also a priority for the *Homelessness Strategy 2008-13*[^92] in respect to prevention.

**Neighbourhood Management of Crime, Disorder and Substance Misuse**

Community consultation has shown that low levels of crime and clean streets are seen as key factors in deciding whether an area will deliver a positive environment in which to live. Anti-social behaviour, both youth-related and general nuisance (including drug dealing and alcohol-related disorder) are consistently identified as major neighbourhood concerns for residents. By working at a locality level, sharing information and engaging with local communities will help shape the services and make

[^91]: Reading Borough Council (2008) - Community Safety Plan
[^92]: Reading Borough Council (2008) - Homelessness Strategy 2008-13
neighbourhoods safer places to live. Strong neighbourhood management across all tenures will help reduce the levels and impact of these issues and there is commitment to a continued partnership approach between the Housing Service and other departments within Reading Borough Council, with external agencies such as the Fire Service and Thames Valley Police - in particular the Neighbourhood Policing Teams.

**Developing preventative services to reduce first time entry into crime and re-offending**

Reading Borough Council will seek to redirect resources into preventative services especially, but not exclusively, for young people to reduce first time offending. This includes Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership members playing an active role on the Local Safeguarding Children Board, in developing a strategic approach to targeted youth support, which will also encompass better wrap-around services for young offenders, including access to housing and employment. In addition to the preventative work the Housing Service completes as a landlord, the Housing Options service has been successful in supporting the delivery of the LAA target monitoring Young Offenders’ access to suitable accommodation. In 2008/09 there was a 99% success rate in respect to this target and this continues to be a priority for the Housing Service. In addition, the new Rent Deposit Scheme has an expectation that 20% of those housed through the scheme will have an offending background. An ‘Offenders protocol’ will also be developed as per the *Homelessness Strategy 2008-13*.

**Neighbourhood Management - Social Housing**

As outlined earlier, Reading Borough Council is still a stock-holding authority and the Housing Service still provides a landlord service. Landlord Services is responsible for the management of 6370 tenancies along with associated estates and neighbourhoods. There are four key service areas:

- **Rents and Revenues** - responsible for maximising rent collection and reducing arrears through effective policies, debt advice and ‘firm but fair’ enforcement action
- **Neighbourhood Services** - managing tenancies, tackling anti-social behaviour and promoting safe and positive estate environments
- **Sheltered Services and Floating Support** - providing safe and welcoming homes to older people across 12 sites and the provision of support to vulnerable tenants across the rest of the stock to help sustain tenancies
- **Tenant Participation** - a specialist team driving and supporting tenant and customer engagement in the planning, delivery and review of all housing services

In 2007, the Audit Commission rated the Landlord Service as providing a ‘good service with promising prospects’. It was also rated 3 out of 4 for the
purpose of the Corporate Performance Assessment in 2007 and again in 2008, with only one indicator in the lower quartile.

A full tenant-profiling project will be launched in spring 2009 and completed by the end of the year. This will allow the Housing Service to ‘tailor’ services to individual customer needs (e.g. preferred method of contact) and also to analyse gaps and opportunities for service access and development (e.g. understanding under occupation and overcrowding or the non take up of debt advice services by age, ethnicity, etc.) A review of the data currently held, together with information from the Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment, indicates a number of challenges. Those of immediate importance to Housing Operational Services include:

- 29% of current tenants are over 65 years of age (compared to 16% in general population)
- 46% of tenants describe themselves as having some form of disability
- 82% of tenants are in receipt of housing benefits (61% in flats)
- 55% of registered one-bed social housing need is from residents aged over 55 years
- 27.7% of households live in the PRS

These statistics indicate an increase of older people, vulnerability and potential worklessness within Reading Borough Council housing stock.

The Landlord Service links to the following Housing Service objectives:

- Build lasting communities by involving local people in decision making
- Provide support to those most in need, promoting social inclusion and tackling discrimination
- Continuously improve by delivering high quality services to council tenants and through exchanging best practice with other social landlords
- Create better quality housing by maintaining and improving Reading Borough Council’s homes and estates, ensuring they are safe, secure and sustainable

The priorities for improvement are:

Customers

- Implement a customer involvement strategy for the Housing Service
- Support the work of the Tenant Services Agency and the development of new service standards for social housing across all social landlords
- Review the Chance for Change Agreement
- Undertake customer profiling survey and use to shape services for 2010-12

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93 As of April 2009
94 Reading Borough Council (2007) – Chance for Change: Tenant Participation Agreement
Firm Foundations: Reading Borough Council Housing Strategy 2009-2014

Properties
• Update our Housing Asset Management strategy for 2009 - 2014
• Review range and use of temporary accommodation - to economically prepare for possible increase in need and for alternative use of current hostel stock

Neighbourhoods
• Develop use of Neighbourhood management action plans to benefit from and support thriving neighbourhoods programme and estate capacity study
• Evaluate Hexham Road neighbourhood improvement plan pilot and select rollout mechanisms for 2009-12

Services
• Continue focus on strong and improving performance against key performance indicators such as customer care.
• Implement new IT system across the service - including mobile working for trades and Neighbourhood Officers
• Continue to focus on Customer Care and satisfaction

It is also necessary to engage with the registered social landlords who oversee the remaining social housing in the borough. In many areas there are mixed estates and in all areas it is important to ensure a consistency in service across all issues from homelessness prevention through to estate improvements. In line with guidance from the Tenant Services Agency, the Housing Service at Reading Borough Council will develop a programme of activities, utilising current mechanisms where possible, that will improve alignment in management across all social landlords in the town.

Private Rented Sector (PRS)

An imbalance between supply and demand in the PRS 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. The Housing Advice Service at Reading Borough Council supports and advises tenants who may be unsatisfied with their landlord or facing issues such as unlawful eviction, but this only helps tenants who contact the local authority.

Low-quality, poorly managed private rented properties can often be concentrated in areas of high deprivation and a single street/neighbourhood can be characterised by this style of renting. Poor management can lead to a high turnover of tenants, further destabilising an area and in turn, causing problems with anti-social behaviour and increased crime rates.

Housing Associations and Local Authority landlords are expected to play a key role in reducing nuisance and anti-social behaviour. This is not the case in the PRS and local police teams and the local authority often take action
without the involvement of the landlord. At Reading Borough Council, the Public Health Team tackles noise nuisance perpetrated by tenants within the PRS. The Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Coordinator based in Safer and Stronger Communities coordinates the Local Authority response to non-noise related anti-social behaviour cases. Poor quality private rented housing, and in particular HMO, has a reputation for being linked to high levels of ASB, drug activity and prostitution. This is supported by analysis of data recorded by the Public Health Team and the Street Services Team, which indicates that the distribution of cases through the town overlaps with the distribution of the PRS.

Although the action of the police and Local Authority can be effective, it is not within these organisations’ power to demonstrate that the ASB is unacceptable via warnings or action against the tenancy of the perpetrator. Where PRS properties are subject to mandatory licensing, the landlord is expected to tackle anti-social behaviour as part of the licence agreement.

**Self-regulation/ support of landlords**

The issue of ‘rogue’ landlords has been highlighted in consultation as a major concern for communities and tenants, including students. However it is difficult to monitor the number of poor landlords both locally or nationally. National research has indicated that standards in the PRS can be improved by helping landlords to self-regulate via a number of methods. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Hosting or partaking in landlord forums to share and encourage good practice
- Offering training and development opportunities
- Running accreditation schemes

Officers from the Environmental Health team at Reading Borough Council already attend the Berkshire Landlords Association and there are strong links with landlords that have already come forward for licensing and who have participated in the previous accreditation scheme.

Landlord accreditation schemes are a means of recognising good practice; landlords meeting a set standard can advertise accordingly and gain market advantage. The schemes are found to be particularly effective in relation to student accommodation. Reading has had a scheme in place for over 10 years, recognised by the Government as a model of good practice and which contributed to a national model of accreditation. The scheme is run with the support of the Universities and Wokingham Borough Council but it has been dormant since 2006, following the introduction of HMO Licensing. There are still over 70 members, and a number of landlords on the waiting list, indicating that there remains interest and support in the scheme. It is planned that this accreditation framework should be reviewed in relation to a potential refresh and re-launch and Reading Borough Council has
committed funding for an additional Private Sector Initiatives Officer who will prioritise this piece of work in 2009/10.

Students

The council tax data for October 2008 shows that 1254 dwellings in the borough are either exempt from paying or are paying a reduced Council Tax contribution, as they are registered as being occupied by students. This represents 1.9% of the dwellings within Reading’s boundaries and 35.6% of the HMO. It is noted that as with HMO, there may be a number of properties that are being used for student accommodation that are not being declared to Council Tax. However, although the issues associated with student accommodation can be felt very acutely in certain streets or neighbourhoods, these statistics indicate that it is a localised concern.

In Reading, students typically live within the community during the second and third years of their education and normally in wards such as Redlands and Abbey that surround the university. Although there are signs that the style of student accommodation is changing nationally, with an increased demand for more ‘high-end’ student properties, the most common type of student accommodation within the borough is 4-6 students sharing a terraced house. Although this style of accommodation is classed as a HMO in the Housing Act 20049595, and may be subject to mandatory licensing, there is no requirement for Planning permission.

Some residents feel that the intensification of student accommodation alters the characteristics of a localised area. Often linked to poor management, student houses are associated with unkempt external areas and an increase in ASB. The increased number of residents in an area also puts a pressure on local amenities, which may change in nature to reflect demand, along with parking. There is often an increase in burglary rates as students have a high number of expensive portable options such as laptops and iPods and there may be a high number of empty properties during the summer months. This change in the character of an area is perpetuated by the fact that the high and relatively guaranteed rental income stream from student renting increases the property price of a house near the university, pricing out other buyers.

In some areas such as Leeds and Nottingham, planning policy has been devised with the intention of constraining the amount of student accommodation in a particular area, with limited success when challenged via an appeal. However, such policies can only be used to refuse permission for any large HMO being developed, or purpose-built student accommodation. Unfortunately, the properties typically being used in the area of intense ‘studentification’ do not require planning permission and therefore the number of student houses in this area cannot be controlled via this mechanism.

95 Office of Public Sector Information (2004)- Housing Act 2004
It is possible for a Local Authority to designate certain areas within their boundaries as subject to additional or selective licensing of HMO. This could be used in areas of intensive student accommodation although there are clear criteria that need to be satisfied and applications need to be made to the Secretary of State for approval. Critically, the Housing Act 2004 states that:

“A significant proportion of the HMO of that description in the area are being managed sufficiently ineffectively to give rise, or be likely to give rise, to one or more particular problems”\textsuperscript{96}.

In addition, it is necessary to evidence that the benefits of licensing, such as registering the landlord and improving standards of accommodation, resolves the issues that are causing concern in that area. Reading Borough Council will investigate the appropriateness and possibility of introducing either scheme in the area.

Clear partnership is necessary with both Reading and Thames Valley University, and landlords in the town in order to manage the issue of student accommodation appropriately. Issues such as joint landlord accreditation schemes, joint enforcement work for environmental and anti-social behaviour issues, and a joined-up approach to distributing information to students living in the community will help to alleviate some of the negative impacts on local communities. A student accommodation action plan will be developed with the towns to both improve the support and accommodation available to students and consider mitigating the impacts of student housing.

**Strategic Objective 6 - Expected Outcomes:**

To ensure strong neighbourhood management across all housing sectors we will:

- Support the delivery of the Community Safety Plan\textsuperscript{97} with a focus on tackling anti-social behaviour and environmental crime
- Improve standards of management across predominately Local Authority-owned estates
- Ensure that all housing providers have shared standards and common approaches in key areas
- Ensure private rented sector landlords and letting agents are engaged with RBC and are aware services, allowing a sharing of best practice and an improvement in standards
- Improve the standard of management in the private rented sector
- Improve standards of accommodation for students, and a reduction of the negative impacts of student accommodation on a local area

\textsuperscript{96} Office of Public Sector Information (2004)- Housing Act 2004
\textsuperscript{97} Reading Borough Council (2008) – Community Safety Plan
Strategic Objective 7:

Develop homelessness prevention services and reduce rough sleeping as detailed in the Homelessness Strategy 2008 -2013\(^98\)

Strategic Objective 7 - Context:

The themes considered within the *Homelessness Strategy 2008-13* reflect the themes of the Government’s homelessness prevention agenda. These have also been raised locally within stakeholder consultation events. Analysis of local data identified that the service user groups reflected in these themes had disproportionate levels of housing needs. The Council recognises that there will be crossovers, as some service users will have interlinked support needs. For example, a vulnerable adult may also be fleeing domestic abuse.

To deliver the *Homelessness Strategy 2008-13*, a detailed action plan has been developed with tasks, timeframes, statutory performance indicators and key people responsible for delivery. The homelessness action plan is derived from the review of homelessness services, multi-agency workshops, service user feedback and views received from the consultation processes.

Strategic Objective 7 - Expected Outcomes:

Deliver the action plan of the *Reading Borough Council’s Homelessness Strategy 2008-13*. Key themes 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

For further information please see *Reading Borough Council’s Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013*\(^99\).

\(^98\) Reading Borough Council (2008) - *Homelessness Strategy 2008-13*

\(^99\) Ibid
Strategic Objective 8

Increase and improve the advice and support for residents and landlords

Strategic Objective 8 - Context:

Utilising Supporting People grants, Reading Borough Council funds a number of floating support schemes designed to help vulnerable client groups live independently in the community. *Reading's Supporting People Commissioning Strategy 2005-2010* sets out the Council’s direction and objectives within this agenda. It is the result of an inter-agency approach in close collaboration with key partners such as the Primary Care Trust and the Thames Valley National Offender Management Service, clients, service providers and the voluntary sector. The vision of the strategy is:

“To enable vulnerable people in Reading to maximize their independence through the provision of a range of high quality, cost effective housing related support services”

The principal aims of the Supporting People Commissioning Strategy here in Reading are to:

- Prevent homelessness and address both housing and support needs
- Promote social inclusion
- Promote independence
- Maximise life choices
- Respond flexibly to individual needs
- Work in partnership
- Use our resources most effectively to deliver high quality, best value public services

Housing-related support funded by Supporting People can be linked to the accommodation an individual is occupying or can manifest as ‘floating support’ which is provided by an external agency while individuals remain in their own homes.

In 2009-2010 Reading Borough Council is contracted to spend £6,159,797 on floating support services, funded by the Supporting People grant. The percentage break down on each client group is indicated in the chart below.

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Footnote: Reading Borough Council (2005) - *Reading’s Supporting People Commissioning Strategy 2005-10*
As part of Reading Borough Council’s objectives for preventing homelessness of vulnerable adults, the *Homelessness Strategy 2008-13* \(^\text{101}\) sets out an intention to “Review the structure of current floating support provision in consultation with providers, and develop an action plan highlighting gaps in provision and identifying where efficiencies could be gained”. It is intended that this review will be widened to include all floating support services, and will review the needs for increased availability of out-of-hours support.

As described in objective two, Reading Borough Council is committed to supporting disabled adults and older people into alternative accommodation to residential care. Consultation with residents and service users for both the Housing and Community Care strategies has indicated that many do not have a clear understanding of the housing options available to them. Therefore, to support the joint strategic priority of both the Housing Strategy and the *Big Voice in Our Lives - Reading Borough Council’s Learning Disability Strategy (2009)* \(^\text{102}\), an allocation of the Learning Disability Development Fund has been allocated to increase the information available to disabled adults and increase client understanding of this issue. Parallel activities will be completed for older people.

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\(^{101}\) Reading Borough Council (2008) - *Homelessness Strategy 2998-13*

\(^{102}\) Reading Borough Council (2008) – *Big Voice in Our Lives – Reading Borough Council’s Learning Disability Strategy*
It is equally important that officers within Reading Borough Council and partner agencies have a clear understanding of the roles, priorities and processes related to each others’ activities. To improve the level of understanding, a series of awareness sessions will be completed to share information and ensure that all residents and services users are supported appropriately to maximise the opportunities available to them.

Reading Borough Council also has an in-house Housing Advice service that supports landlords and tenants to maintain PRS tenancies. In 2007/2008 Housing Advice dealt with 1662 cases supporting 119 landlords and 1543 tenants. Reading Borough Council also grant funds REAP resettlement agency to support vulnerable tenants to maintain PRS tenancies. In addition, the Public Health team support landlords via mechanisms such as the ‘Landlord Information Evening’ and attending the ‘Berkshire Landlords Forum’. In recognition of the importance of the private rented sector in Reading, all possibilities for increasing the support for landlords and private sector tenants will be investigated.

Strategic Objective 8 – Expected Outcomes:

To increase and improve the advice and support for residents and landlords we will:

- Increase the awareness of older people and disabled adults of their housing options and their confidence in accessing advice and services
- Ensure that partners, both internal and external, have a clear understanding of the roles of Housing Needs and Neighbourhood Management
- Support tenants and landlords maintain private sector tenancies
Strategic Objective 9

Develop communities and improve community cohesion and engagement

Strategic Objective 9 - Context:

Community Cohesion

There is a clear expectation from central Government regarding the Local Authority’s place-shaping role and its links to the strategic housing function. Place-shaping is “The creative use of powers and influence to promote the general well-being of a community and its citizens.”

The vision within Reading Borough Council’s Framework for Community Cohesion reflects the vision set out in the Reading 2020 strategy and its vision for an ‘Inclusive Society’:

“Reading is a place where everyone can contribute to, and benefit from, a vibrant and diverse community. It is a place where all people thrive - physically, mentally, socially, spiritually and economically. It is a welcoming place where everyone feels safe and valued. It is a place where people feel they belong and where they have the opportunity to participate fully in the community. It is a place that celebrates diversity and there are strong and positive relationships between people of different backgrounds.”

A Community Cohesion and Equalities Review, completed in June 2006, indicated that there are key factors that make people feel welcome, that they belong and that builds strong and positive relationships between people of different backgrounds. These are:

- Accessible services with staff that understand diverse needs
- Providing clear information and advice about rights and responsibilities, entitlements and services
- Providing language support
- Tackling poverty and committing resources to deprived neighbourhoods
- Empowering local communities to find local solutions in co-operation with local agencies.
- Activities that provide opportunities for different communities and age groups to do things together.
- Celebrating the rich diversity of our community and cultural heritage.
- Keeping people and neighbourhoods safe
- Local agencies working together

103 HM Treasury (2007) Lyons inquiry into local government
104 Reading Borough Council (2007) – Community Cohesion Framework
105 Reading Borough Council (2006) – Community Cohesion and Equalities Review
In response to this review, a *Community Cohesion Framework* has been developed and the Housing Strategy will look to support the delivery of the community cohesion action plan with a particular alignment with the ‘Neighbourhoods’ section. This will:

“Address disparities between poor, deprived neighbourhoods and their more affluent counterparts”\(^{106}\).

The objectives in this section of the Community Cohesion Framework being delivered via the ‘Thriving Neighbourhoods Programme’ have clear links with Reading Borough Council’s emerging Anti-Poverty Strategy.

**Thriving Neighbourhoods Programme**

The Thriving Neighbourhoods Programme (TNP) is a Reading Borough Council-led response to the issue of persistent and deep-seated deprivation in a number of Reading’s communities. A neighbourhood planning approach that engages with local people and joins up a range of existing locality work to deliver better outcomes underpins the TNP. It therefore provides a focus for a co-ordinated Council-wide and multi-agency approach to achieve tangible improvements in the areas of highest social deprivation across Reading.

The TNP is predicated on a community development approach to engage and establish a partnership with local people in order to inform and improve services and take-up across a range of key agencies. This approach requires a clear and sustained targeting of limited resources and the programme will focus on those areas of Reading falling within the 20% most deprived in the country, as measured by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation.

A performance management framework for the programme is in place that is aligned with existing core service indicators, but also includes indicators specific to the individual Neighbourhood Plans in the programme areas. Targets are set and then monitored against these indicators in order to measure the programme’s success.

In addition, Reading Borough Council is developing an Anti-Poverty Strategy that sets out the challenge Reading faces in reducing poverty and how current activities relate to it. The Action Plan outlines the additional initiatives the Council and its partners will take in seeking to address these issues more effectively and deliver better outcomes.

The Government has committed to halve child poverty by 2020 and in light of the current economic situation it is anticipated that there will be a rise in the number of households in poverty in Reading, evidenced already in the increasing numbers seeking work and/or debt advice. Reducing poverty (particularly where it affects children) and linked indicators around

\(^{106}\) Ibid
worklessness and basic skills have been included in Reading Borough Council’s 35 priority national indicators for the Local Area Agreement (LAA).

Reading is a diverse town consisting of 93 super-output areas (SOAs). Of these, nine are in the top 10% wealthiest SOAs and 11 are in the most 20% deprived. Whilst Reading has seen some significant improvements in performance in areas known to impact on poverty such as school attendance and school performance, the 2007 indices of deprivation indicates that the gap between the most deprived and the more advantaged is growing. The situation has worsened overall with 11 SOAs in the 20% most deprived in England compared to eight in 2004. This is in line with the South East trend. However, in relation to housing and services, the picture has improved with two SOAs in the 20% most deprived compared to ten in 2004, and one in the 10% most deprived compared to two in 2004.
The objectives of the Anti-Poverty Action Plan flow from the agreement of priorities within the Sustainable Community Strategy and are to deliver specific Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets aimed directly at reducing poverty:
In seeking to deliver these targets, a related objective will also be to reduce the gap between the most and least deprived communities across Reading. The action plan will also support delivery of other key LAA targets where work is led by other thematic delivery groups and in particular, those relating to school attainment, adult basic skills and fuel poverty.

The Thriving Neighbourhood areas described and the super output target areas for the Anti-Poverty Strategy have clear links and overlap, when mapped, with the Local Authority-owned estates within the town. Therefore, the Housing Service is a clear partner for delivering both programs, in particular with respect to tackling worklessness and increasing financial inclusion.

Children and Young People

2009 sees the delivery of the new Children and Young People Plan\textsuperscript{107} outlining the strategic direction of the Children’s Trust. The vision for the trust is:

“Creating a positive and ambitious environment for Reading children and young people so that they:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Are happy, healthy and coping with change and challenge
  \item Are enthusiastic and skilled learners
  \item Value themselves and others\textsuperscript{108}
\end{itemize}

Housing is a key area of importance in ensuring that the vision of the Children’s Trust is realised, both in terms of the standard and suitability of accommodation for families and also in facilitating access to a safe, secure place to live for independent young people. Historically, the Housing Service and Directorate of Education and Children’s services have successfully worked in partnership to achieve cross-directorate targets and objectives. By way of an example, this is evidenced by the fact that 99% of young offenders have been facilitated to obtain suitable accommodation in 2008/2009, and this was reflected in the Local Area Agreement. The necessity of this joined-up approach is further emphasised by an Office for National Statistics report released in April 2009, which highlights that 31% of children in the UK were found to be living in non-decent accommodation\textsuperscript{109}.

In order to maximise the benefits of partnership working in relation to positive outcomes for young people in Reading, the new Housing Strategy and the Children and Young People’s Plan have been written in partnership.

\textsuperscript{107} Reading Borough Council (2009) - Children and Young Peoples plan
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid
The key priorities within the *Children and Young People’s Plan* where there will be the need for joint working with Housing are:

- Achieving the objectives of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy
- Intervening earlier to prevent children and young people’s engagement in crime and substance misuse; for the purpose of the Housing Strategy this will mean a commitment to:
  - Engage with the Prevention and Support Service and the work of the prevention panels to ensure housing services are maximising children and young people’s access to targeted support
  - Partake in the developing co-ordinated approach to the delivery of drug education, information and targeted prevention work and ensure that all professionals are trained and confident in the delivery of this work
  - Engage with the programme to ensure closer working across communities, localities and services to enable young people who need it to access drug & alcohol treatment services. This will include delivering integrated drop-in services for young people
- Increase the number of children and young people and families who access stronger and more holistic intervention earlier to improve life chances
- Ensure suitable accommodation for young people with support needs, for single young people aged 16 - 17 and also teenage parents is provided
- Reduce the impact of poverty on children and families\(^\text{110}\)

In addition, as discussed above, Housing and Children’s Services will work collectively to improve the transition for disabled children into Housing Services.

As discussed in Objective 7, there is a clear role for housing-related services in delivering the Community Safety Plan. This includes tackling hate crime towards those with a disability on housing estates, which in turn has links to the emerging Community Care Strategies.

**Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Communities**

As stated previously, as of 2001, 13.2% of the population in Reading are from BME Communities.

One of the areas of concern in the 2004 Housing Strategy update was the low level of satisfaction in the BME community relating to housing. In order to understand the context of this in greater detail, Reading Borough Council

\(^{110}\) Reading Borough Council (2009) - *Draft Children and Young Peoples Plan*
commissioned a BME Housing Survey by the University of Salford in 2004\textsuperscript{111}, delivered in 2006.

The findings of this research have informed the development of this strategy. A number of issues are discussed elsewhere in the document but additional outstanding recommendations from the survey are listed below.

**Key Recommendations:**
- Greater access to information about all housing options needs to be disseminated to the BME communities to prevent an over reliance on the private rented sector (PRS), especially amongst the black community
- Applying an Equality Impact Assessment against the Allocations process
- Social housing providers need to review policies to alleviate overcrowding
- More investigation of financial assistance for purchasing property
- The work of the local Home Improvement Agency should be advertised to the BME Communities
- New housing developments should be considered in the context of a range of property sizes which include facilities to meet the cultural needs of the various communities - this should include the development of accommodation targeted towards specialist client groups
- An audit of supported housing options within Reading should be undertaken to ensure it meets the cultural needs of the BME community
- Increased attention and appropriate support should be given to the integration of new community groups into traditional community areas

**Economic Migrants**

In 2008, Reading Borough Council was one of a nine Local Authorities involved in study completed by the Institute of Community Cohesion - *The Impact of Migration on Local Public Services*\textsuperscript{112}. This study attempted to identify some specific costs in relation to corporate services within nine local authorities and some service specific research with three authorities each for Education, Social Care and Housing.

Between May 2004 and December 2007 there were 2,790 Worker Registration Scheme registrations in Reading and it is estimated from these figures that A8\textsuperscript{113} migrant workers now account for 13 out of every 1,000 people in Reading\textsuperscript{114}. A large number of Reading’s migrant workers are from Poland (over 60%), although Slovaks, Lithuanians and Czechs are also

\textsuperscript{111} University of Salford (2004) – *BME Housing Survey*
\textsuperscript{112} Institute of Community Cohesion (2008) – *The impact of Migration on Local Public Services*
\textsuperscript{113} Migrants from one of the 8 accession countries that became part of the European Union in May 2004
\textsuperscript{114} Institute of Community Cohesion (2008) – *The impact of Migration on Local Public Services*
present in significant numbers. Most migrants are male and aged between 18 and 34 years without dependents.

Most migrant workers coming into the area find employment in the growing service sector (restaurants, bars and coffee shops) as well as in more traditional industries such as construction. Also of particular note in Reading is the emergence of Polish food shops in the town and newsagents stocking Polish newspapers. In particular, a version of the local weekly paper is now produced in Polish. Also, a WH Smiths store in Reading has reported that sales of Polish novels now account for around 10% of its sales.

The Reading-based research, reflected in the main report, indicated that the impact of increased migration on the main routes into social housing is, at present, negligible. That said, authorities expect those pressures and demands to increase, which will inevitably impact in the longer term.

There was found to be a growing pressure on private rented housing, in particular HMO, and the consequential increasing demands on private sector housing teams within the local authority to respond to increasing numbers of inspections, registrations and enforcement actions. Not only is there an increase in the number of cases, but also each case can be more complicated to resolve due to the fact that the residents have recently migrated to the town.

Additional pressures facing the Housing Service relate to a growing number of Eastern Europeans sleeping rough. On street counts undertaken in April 2008 an average of eight rough sleepers were recorded per week. During this snapshot period, 38% of clients found were Eastern European migrants without recourse to public funds.

The Housing Needs Service commissions a rough sleepers outreach team to provide outreach services to enable individuals to access supported housing. Since March 2007, Eastern European rough sleepers have been found sleeping in car parks. The team found these rough sleepers would then move out of the car parks once they had found suitable employment; turnover was high in this environment. However, a hardcore group developed with alcohol dependency issues who were not working. The team increasingly spent time with this group, motivating them into employment or repatriating them back to their country of origin.

The Outreach Team offers the following support:

- Engages with clients on street shifts
- Joint shifts with police and health
- Assesses rough sleepers’ circumstances and support needs
- Delivers advice and information regarding services in Reading, and the limitations of support available to them e.g. Unlikely to be eligible for benefits, statutory homelessness assistance or local authority accommodation, no recourse to public funds so no route
into supported housing/hostels/emergency shelters as not entitled to housing benefit

- Provides support, travel and financial assistance to obtain ID/Passports
- Funds Polish-speaking outreach to work with the Polish street population in Reading

In addition, during 2008 The Reading Declaration Partnership on Race Equality published a ‘Welcome Pack’ for newcomers to Reading to meet its target to ensure that information about basic rights and entitlements is provided to newcomers to Reading. The pack gives essential information on the key services, covering things such as housing, employment, travel, emergencies, health, finances and community support. It also lists other places and organisations where people can find out more information. This is supported by additional translated information regarding more specific issues such as waste management.

**Tenant and Customer Involvement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resident Involvement Champion for the South East</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Borough Council’s Tenant Participation Unit has been asked to lead on the development of a Residents’ Involvement Champion (RIC) network for the southeast region.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This project is being funded by the Communities and Local Government Peer Support programme and has been made possible by the Improvement and Development Agency’s (iDeA’s) Strategic Housing programme.

The purpose of RIC is to provide a mechanism to support all housing organisations in improving the way we involve tenants and residents in decisions about their homes and neighbourhoods. The aim is to share skills and knowledge so we are able to assist residents to be actively engaged in influencing operational and strategic housing outcomes within their communities.

This will be done by:

- Building a database of housing organisations in the region and identifying strengths/areas of expertise with residents’ involvement
- Highlighting best practice
- Providing a vehicle for organisations to share experiences and ask for help when needed
- Identifying common issues so we can work together to develop solutions
The vision of the draft *Tenant and Customer Involvement Strategy 2008 - 11* is as follows:

“Reading Borough Council’s Housing Service is committed to working with tenants and customers to develop genuine involvement that values diversity and inclusiveness and ensures that all have the opportunity to influence our policies and the delivery of a tenant and customer focused service.”

The draft strategy has five key aims:

1. Make tenant and customer needs and priorities, through tenant and customer involvement, central to the whole organisation of our service
2. Ensure that tenant and customer involvement leads to greater efficiency through improved services and outcomes for service users
3. Ensure that all users, or potential users, have fair and equal access to tenant and customer involvement opportunities
4. Communicate and consult effectively with service users and stakeholders at all levels about tenant and customer involvement
5. Involve communities to improve cohesion and increase influence over quality of life issues as set out in the Housing and Sustainable Communities Strategies

The strategy focuses on the following objectives:

- Identifying involvement opportunities and involving residents at the earliest possible stage in policy formation/review and service delivery
- Measuring, tracking and evaluating the costs and benefits of tenant and customer involvement to shape future activity
- Improving the ways we involve minority and ‘hard to reach’ groups
- Upholding the principles of Tenant Participation Agreements and to monitor and review all arrangements for tenant and customer involvement and Tenant Participation Agreements
- Ensuring tenant and customer involvement in the development of relevant Borough-wide plans, such as, the Housing and Sustainable Communities Strategies and Thriving Neighbourhoods Agenda

In addition it is recognised that due to the high levels of privately rented accommodation in the town, it would be beneficial for tenant champions to be identified to represent the views of residents within that tenure. This option will be explored as part of this strategy.

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115 Reading Borough Council (2008) – *Draft Tenant and Customer Involvement Strategy*
Strategic Objective 9 - Expected Outcomes:

To develop communities and improve community cohesion and engagement we will:

- Improve community cohesion in the town
- Reduce deprivation in the town
- Improve the availability and co-ordination of financial inclusion activities and strategies across all tenures and social landlords in the borough
- Ensure that the Housing Service contributes effectively towards improving a child’s welfare
- Ensure that residents, including disabled adults, feel safe and included in our communities
- Involve tenants and residents in shaping housing services
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

Strategic Objective 10 - Context:

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.

Historically, Reading Borough Council has proactively engaged with the Neighbouring Authorities on the delivery of cross-boundary projects; for example the draft Berkshire Housing Strategy and the commissioning of DTZ to complete the Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment\(^\text{116}\). This regional partnership activity is continuing with ongoing officer and member meetings relating to Housing Strategy, enabling and planning issues faced by all Berkshire Authorities. Reading Borough Council is committed to the delivery of the new Berkshire Housing Strategy.

Partnership work is also completed in relation to operational challenges and recently, the Department of Communities and Local Government has awarded additional funding to Reading Borough Council to work jointly with Slough Borough Council to deliver preventative services aimed at reducing the impact of the recession. Work is still progressing on a Sub-Region Choice Based Lettings System and Reading continues to be strongly involved in the cross-Berkshire review of planning policy in relation to ‘age-proofing’ future homes and neighbourhoods.

One area that requires a joint regional approach is providing for the Gypsy and Traveller Communities in the region. Reading Borough Council continues to work with adjoining authorities and others to identify potential sites to meet the identified needs of the wider area within the context of the policy for Gypsies and Travellers that is emerging through the South East Plan\(^\text{117}\). A proposed policy on Gypsy and Travellers Sites was agreed by SEERA on 4\(^{th}\) March 2009 and this has now been submitted to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State will hold an Examination in Public into the policy. The Examination in Public is set to take place on 24-27\(^{th}\) November 2009.

\(^{116}\) DTZ Consulting & research (2007) – Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment

\(^{117}\) South East England Regional Assembly (2009) – South East Plan
In addition to other Local Authorities within Berkshire, it is critical for Reading Borough Council to maintain strong links with regional bodies such as the Government Office of the South East (GOSE), and large organisations that work in the area. Housing Associations are engaged via the ‘Berkshire Housing Strategist’ Meetings and the Housing Management Forum. Strategic Objective 10 - Expected Outcomes:

To maximise cross-boundary working to collectively meet the needs of the region we will:

- Ensure that Reading is involved in planning and implementing cross boundary activities and has strong links with regional bodies such as GOSE and the HCA
- Meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers on a sub-regional basis.
## Resources

### Approved Capital Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capital Budgets</th>
<th>2009/10 £000s</th>
<th>2010/11 £000s</th>
<th>2011/12 £000s</th>
<th>2012/13 £000s</th>
<th>2013/14 £000s</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Housing Development</td>
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<td>4,535</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Home Improvement Scheme</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Sector Grants</td>
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<td>500</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled Facilities Grants (Private Sector)</td>
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<td>500</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Housing Schemes</td>
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<td><strong>HRA Schemes</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled Facilities Grants (Local Authority Tenants)</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>530</td>
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<td>Decent Homes Standard</td>
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<td>4,880</td>
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<tr>
<td>Works to Garages</td>
<td>250</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Housing</strong></td>
<td>16,181</td>
<td>11,825</td>
<td>5,090</td>
<td>5,410</td>
<td>5,690</td>
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### Private Sector Grants (£000s)

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount (£)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Handiperson Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private Sector Renewal Grants</td>
<td>£500</td>
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Budget for 2009/10

Revenue spend on key Housing Functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Approved Budget 2009/2010 (£’000)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing General Fund</td>
<td>1,972</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building Maintenance and Property Management</td>
<td>471</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,443</td>
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</table>

Housing Revenue Account

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is the ring-fenced account that covers the tenancy management and asset management costs of the housing stock in the ownership of the Council. Revenue is delivered into this account by Government allocation, Major Repairs Allowance and rent and service charges income. However, as Reading Borough Council is in negative subsidy within the national subsidy system, a sum of money is paid each year to the Government that is greater than the Major Repairs Allowance. Significant effort is made to maximise the income by adhering to the strategic direction of the Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plan, and good rent collection performance (currently national top quartile performance).

The allowance paid in to the HRA is delivered as part of the national subsidy scheme. All council housing is viewed as a single national asset and the overall income from this asset is then distributed back to Local Authority HRAs according to a formula. The main drivers are the number and type of dwellings and there is recognition in the formula for issues that may influence the costs of delivering a housing service including higher costs that apply in the South East. The additional costs associated with housing management in relatively higher crime areas, and the age of the stock. Reading Borough Council is currently in negative subsidy, which means that the level of allowance provided by the government is less than our total rental income so in practice, this results in annual payments being made to the government. It is worth noting that the housing subsidy system is currently under review and, dependent on the outcome of that review, major changes to the HRA may occur during the period of this strategy.
The current budget of the HRA is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Approved (£’000)</th>
<th>Budget 2009/2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expenditure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairs and Maintenance</td>
<td>11,190</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision and Management</td>
<td>16,187</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Subsidy</td>
<td>3,913</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capital Finance</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>33,540</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rents</td>
<td>32,843cr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>215cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution from General Fund</td>
<td>34cr</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>33,092</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Net Expenditure</strong></td>
<td>448</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>HRA Balance at 1st April</td>
<td>7,351cr</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Earmarked Balance B/Fwd</td>
<td>1,347cr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net Surplus (cr)/ Deficit for year</td>
<td>448</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRA Balance at 31st March</td>
<td>6,903cr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Earmarked Balance C/Fwd</td>
<td>1,347cr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Supporting People Grant - £6,159,797**

**Growth Point Funding (£000s)**

The agreed framework for expenditure is as follows:

**Capital**

Extra Care Housing - £2m
Home improvement scheme - £0.5m
Major mixed-use scheme - £1.9m

**Revenue**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008/09</th>
<th>09/10</th>
<th>10/11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood renewal programme</td>
<td>90k</td>
<td>90k</td>
<td>90k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban Housing Capacity Study</td>
<td>63k</td>
<td>10k</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empty Homes Initiative</td>
<td>30k</td>
<td>30k</td>
<td>30k</td>
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