Introduction

In 2011, we produced a comprehensive Housing and Homelessness Strategy for 2011-2016. The aim of the strategy is to make sure Rushmoor’s residents have access to good quality homes, affordable and appropriate to their needs.

This second update is produced to explain our current housing position and explain any new steps we have taken to ensure residents are able to meet their housing needs.

Four themes underpin our strategic approach to tackling housing problems and preventing homelessness:

1. Housing supply and the delivery of good quality housing
2. Homelessness and Homelessness Prevention
3. Housing to meet the needs of specific groups
4. Neighbourhoods and housing standards

Over the last 12 months economic stagnation and central government policy changes around welfare reform have affected the local housing market and increasing numbers of residents, resulting in greater demand for housing services. Despite the challenges, Rushmoor’s housing service continues to secure housing supply, enforce good housing standards and support residents experiencing housing problems.

Housing strategy delivery plan

The delivery plan identifies objectives for each of the four strategic themes. The purpose of the plan is to monitor how we meet housing objectives over the life of the plan. We have added action points to ensure the housing service remains flexible enough to adapt to the changing economic and political environment. The plan is very much a working document for housing officers and serves as a useful tool to inform our strategic approach.

Theme 1 Housing supply and delivering good quality housing

Achievements in housing delivery for 2012-2013 include:

- **One hundred and fifty nine new affordable homes delivered.**
- **Viability problems at Queensgate were resolved, securing 53 affordable homes in Farnborough.**
- **Nine empty properties brought back into use.**
● Planning permission granted for 3850 new homes at the Aldershot Urban Extension, including 35% affordable homes.

● Capital Budget of £200,000 secured to contribute towards funding of affordable housing.

● Selection criteria for Preferred Development Partners reviewed and number of partners reduced from six to five to focus support to actively developing RP’s in the borough. Our Preferred Development Partners are A2 Dominion; First Wessex, Radian, Sentinel, Thames Valley Housing Association.

● First Wessex delivers six outright sale properties to provide subsidy for affordable homes as part of the North Town project.

Following two years of limited affordable housing supply, the delivery level improved in 2012/13 with the completion of 255 new homes across all tenure types, 159 of which were affordable homes.

![New Housing Supply 2010-2013](image)

Development of key strategic sites will boost the supply of new homes, including affordable housing, as planned for in the Council’s Core Strategy (2011).

Last year we stated that reduced public subsidy for affordable homes, combined with the launch of the affordable rent model had resulted in Registered Providers (RP’s) feeling cautious about developing new homes. This contributed to the low level of affordable housing supply between 2010 and 2012. During 2012/13 we saw RP’s respond to the new funding regime to ensure that they can continue to deliver new affordable homes in Rushmoor.

● Four of our five preferred development partners signed up to the Homes and Community Agency development framework to secure an element of grant from central government with which to deliver homes for affordable rent and shared ownership. These RPs are working to achieve their development targets under the Framework which ends in 2015.
Each RP has adopted policies to convert varying levels of their existing properties available for re-letting from social rent to affordable rent. This increases the amount of revenue available to them to support loans for the development of new affordable housing. Affordable rent can cost tenants up to a third more than a social rent. We are working with our partners to monitor the impact this change is having on residents.

Some RP’s have raised significant levels of private finance from the Bond Markets. To ensure we are able to support RP’s and remain effective in the enabling role we are seeking a better understanding of the implications of increased reliance on private finance to affordable housing development.

Housing Needs Information

We will continue to monitor levels of housing need in the borough using information from our Housing Options Team and we are planning to update our Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Housing Needs Assessment during 2013/14. This will help us to plan for future housing and to continue to secure affordable housing using planning policies set out in our Core Strategy.

Community Infrastructure Levy

Work continues on developing the Council’s approach to the Community Infrastructure Levy. The cost of provision of Suitable Alternative Green Space to mitigate for development close to the Thames Basin Special Protection Area will make up a significant proportion of the CIL charge to be levied in the borough. This could add significantly to the costs of residential development and we will need to monitor the effect this has on the provision of affordable housing

Strategic Sites

Strategic Site- Queensgate Farnborough: During 2012-13, viability problems threatening the provision of affordable homes were resolved. The delivery of 53 affordable homes by Radian is due to complete at the end of 2013 concluding the provision of general needs family housing. Part of the remaining site, previously identified for the provision of a private residential care, now forms part of Hampshire County Council’s Project Extra Care Programme.

Strategic Site- North Town Regeneration Aldershot: The regeneration of North Town by First Wessex is progressing well and we are starting to see a community transformed. Ninety two new homes have been constructed with a further 84 scheduled to complete by March 2014. In December 2012 residents of the sheltered housing scheme Alma House moved into a brand new 26 unit sheltered scheme, also called Alma House. We have supported First Wessex in a bid for additional funding from the Homes and Communities Agency to bring forward the next phases of development. This will reduce the amount of time families decanted into temporary
accommodation will have to wait to move into their new homes and also free up the homes they currently occupy (off site) for other households in the North Town area.

**Strategic Site- Aldershot Urban Extension:** We will be delivering 3,850 new homes, 1,347 of which will be affordable homes, on this key strategic site to the North of Aldershot. Rushmoor’s legal, planning and housing teams have been working closely with Grainger Plc through the pre planning application stages to ensure the scheme meets a range of housing, community and infrastructure needs. We are also working to ensure new homes meet appropriate development standards and the housing policy mix is achieved. Approval was given for the hybrid planning application in July 2013 and infrastructure works are planned to start on site in November 2013.

Grainger have achieved Registered Provider status with the Homes and Community Agency.

**Standard of New Affordable Housing**

We continue to press for affordable housing that meets good quality standards and we aim to update our Development Brief for RPs and developers during 2013/14. Work on this will inform the preparation of a Community Infrastructure Levy and Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document which will set out our expectations in planning policy.

New actions for this theme are:

- To work with planning to commission a new Strategic Housing Market Assessment including a Housing Needs Study by April 2014
- To update the Development Brief by April 2014

**Theme 2 Homelessness and Homelessness Prevention**

*Achievements for 2012-2013 include:*

- **Ninety-three Rent Bonds issued to secure accommodation in the private sector.**
- **Enhanced Housing Options Software installed and officers trained in December 2012, this includes a new online housing options self-assessment tool on the Rushmoor Borough Council website.**
- **Additional Staff resources assisted in the identification of suitable private sector accommodation.**
- **Private sector leasing scheme with Chapter 1 has been set up.**
The first update explained that a combination of factors relating to the supply of suitable accommodation were increasing pressure on the housing market and making it more difficult for households to solve their housing problems. We were seeing an increase in the number of households:

- Seeking housing advice
- Accessing financial support through the Rent Deposit Scheme
- Presenting as homeless and requiring bed and breakfast

We sought to address these issues by implementing initiatives set out in last years update:

- A private sector leasing scheme has been set up with specialist housing association Chapter 1
- We employed an accommodation officer on a temporary basis
- We made use of the Government’s Preventing Repossessions Fund to assist homeowners.

Despite the measures we put in place, the situation has deteriorated further over the past year as welfare reform has added further financial pressure to households.

We remain dependent on the private rented sector to provide housing options to those in housing need. The Localism Act 2011 allows local authorities to discharge the full housing duty owed to homeless households into the private rented sector with an offer of an assured short hold tenancy of at least 12 months. These changes mean that people making a homelessness application can no longer refuse a reasonable offer of privately rented accommodation in favour of a social housing tenancy. We are now discharging our duty to homelessness households by securing private sector tenancies in line with the Localism Act, which does not require the applicants consent.

Analysis of the demands on our service between April 2012 and April 2013 showed that:

- Sixty eight percent of all face- to- face housing demand required help to find accommodation and 21% required help to remain in their existing accommodation.
- The number of homelessness applications had increased by 58%.
- Cold weather placements increased from two placements to thirty.
- The number of rent bonds issued increased by 72% (these applications are time consuming).
- One hundred and thirty two households were placed in Bed and Breakfast compared with 59 in 2011/12 at a cost in the region of £100,000 to the council.
The average time spent on enquiries has increased from 10 minutes to 30 minutes as people are presenting with more complex housing and financial circumstances.

Increased time spent with each customer reduces our ability to respond to telephone enquiries.

In response we have developed an online housing advice self assessment tool that allows people to access information on their housing options leaving housing options staff to concentrate on those least able to help themselves.

In addition, in June 2013, Cabinet approved proposals to recruit additional staff to the Housing Options Team. One additional permanent, full time member of staff and one temporary, full time member of staff on an 18-month contract are appointed.

New actions for this theme are:

- Explore alternative options to address the increase in cold weather placements
- Promote the online Housing Options tool.
- Encourage Registered Providers to consider private market units as part of their housing offer.
- Discharge homelessness duty with an offer of accommodation in the private sector with or without the applicants consent and in line with the Localism Act 2011.

**Theme 3 Meeting the needs of specific groups**

*Achievements for 2012/13 include:*

- Housing Allocation scheme is updated to reflect the Military Covenant to ensure fair treatment for military personnel and to reflect welfare reform
- Quarterly Joint Housing Officers meetings are reinstated with Defence Infrastructure Organisation to support military personnel
- Under Occupation Plan is in place
- Alma House 26 unit sheltered housing scheme is completed at North Town
- One hundred and five Disabled Facilities Grants administered compared with 94 in the previous year and a new procurement process secured £48,000 in savings.

Older People’s Housing has been delivered at Alma House and we have put in place an under occupation plan to provide incentives and support for those wanting to downsize. This plan became a priority for Rushmoor in response to the introduction of the Under Occupancy Penalty (bedroom tax) in April 2013.
The reinstatement of quarterly Joint Housing Officer Meetings with Defence Infrastructure Organisation should ensure that those leaving the armed forces and their families have access to timely and relevant housing information. We hope this proactive approach will put more armed forces leavers in a better position to secure their own accommodation and prevent cases of homelessness.

The Housing team is working closely with the Communities team to ensure good quality housing advice is accessible to Nepalese residents and that housing issues, specific to the local Nepali community are responded to appropriately.

New Actions for this theme are:

- To engage regularly with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation
- To work with the Communities team to ensure the housing service remains accessible to Nepalese residents and that we are able to respond appropriately to the housing issues affecting them.

**Theme 4 Developing Neighbourhoods and Housing Standards**

*Achievement for 2012-2013*

- *Ninety-two Homes delivered through the North Town regeneration project.*
- *Tenancy Strategy is in place.*
- *An additional 15 HMOs have been licenced.*
- *Energy efficiency caseworkers are available through Rushmoor Healthy Living and Family Mosaic Housing Association.*
- *Insulate Hampshire invested £400,000 on 1,417 Energy Efficiency measures.*

**Promoting Sustainable neighbourhoods**

The housing team works closely with planning to ensure that planning policy includes current housing standards and gives clear guidance to developers. The Tenancy Strategy provides guidance to RP’s on the new flexibilities available in terms of the types of tenancy granted.

We are working with RP’s to monitor the effect of affordable rent on neighbourhoods, in particular on the impact on affordability and housing choice for non-benefit claiming households.

**Resident Satisfaction**

We continue to monitor resident satisfaction with new developments using surveys and through the RP Review process. Satisfaction levels average 80% against a target of 60%.
Registered Provider Reviews

The review process provides the opportunity for members to find out more about each housing association, strengthening existing relationships and developing further partnership working. The organisations reviewed during 2012/13 were:

- A2 Dominion
- Defence Estates
- Radian
- Sanctuary

A report to cabinet in June 2013 provided an overview of each organisation, identified where things are going well, causes for concern and areas to follow up. Key issues explored through the review process were:

- Welfare Reform
- Estate Management and Repairs
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Development within the new HCA framework using the affordable rent model

Community Panel have approved a programme for 2013/14 and we will continue to use this forum to strengthen partnership working.

Tenancy Strategy

Our strategy provides broad support for the use of fixed term tenancies in order to make best use of the existing housing stock in an area of high housing demand. The strategy seeks to balance this with the desire to protect vulnerable households and encourage sustainable communities.

Following consultation with RP’s operating in the borough the strategy was adopted in January 2013. Its delivery will depend on continued partnership working. A copy of the Tenancy Strategy is available on the Rushmoor website

We will work with our RP partners to monitor the effect of the introduction of fixed term tenancies in the borough.


Housing Standards

We continue to work to ensure good housing standards in the borough, working closely with developers to ensure that new affordable homes comply with the Homes and Community Agency 2007 Design and Quality Standards.
During 2012/13, the Private Sector Housing team addressed 377 complaints relating to private rented properties, 94 of which related to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO). A proactive approach to working with private landlords helps to address problems quickly and ensures the existing housing stock offers residents with safe, energy efficient homes.

The production of a Landlords newsletter and the annual Landlords Forum are proving effective ways to engage with Landlords through which the council can disseminate key messages, for example the impact of welfare reform on overcrowding.

**HMO’s**

We are continuing to conduct surveys on an area by area basis to identify unlicensed HMO’s and work with landlords to ensure they comply with the relevant requirements, we currently have 108 licenced HMO’s.

Increasing numbers of new landlords are coming in to the borough buying larger property portfolios and running them on a more business like basis. This is improving opportunities to consult with them regarding fire safety, general amenities and licensing. Private landlords have largely been receptive to the impact of welfare reform on their tenants, seeking advice from the housing and benefit teams.

**Disabled Facilities Grants and Home Improvement Loans**

Improvements to the administration of DFG’s reported last year continue to provide customers with a streamlined approach. Simple DFG’s can be processed more quickly which has improved the service to the customer, reducing waiting times by 40% and saving £50,700 on low level access showers compared to 2011/12.

Rushmoor remains the best performing Local Authority within the Surrey & Hampshire Improvement Partnership (SHIP) administering loans to the value of £27,903.00 in 2012/13.

**Energy Efficiency**

We have continued to make good progress in promoting energy efficiency measures available to residents. Insulate Hampshire ran 23 promotional events in the borough resulting in 1,417 energy saving measures being installed. The Insulate Hampshire scheme was extremely successful throughout Hampshire and won the Climate Week Award for best local initiative. Our Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) report 2013 highlights the council’s proposed energy saving initiatives up to 2015 and is available on the Rushmoor website.

http://www.rushmoor.gov.uk/article/3841/Reducing-energy-use
Rushmoor Healthy Living is our partner to provide energy efficiency advice in the borough. Nepalese speaking staff ensures older Nepalese residents are informed about energy efficiency initiatives.

Rushmoor also benefits from an Energy Caseworker, employed by Family Mosaic, to support the on-going energy projects as part of our Home Improvement Agency contract. This is a shared service with Hart District Council for 2 days each week and the work focusses largely on promoting all of the Energy Efficiency initiatives to residents.

RP partners work hard to ensure their existing housing stock is energy efficient. TVHA and Yorkshire Energy Services are delivering an Affordable Warmth Scheme for replacement boilers on the Pipers Pitch Estate in Farnborough. This estate has recently been connected to mains gas to improve fuel affordability for residents.

TVHA residents living on the Rafborough Estate in Farnborough may benefit from work to their homes through Yorkshire Energy Services to improve insulation in these hard to treat, solid wall properties.

First Wessex and Kingfisher have launched retrofit projects in Heronwood Aldershot starting later this year with another retrofit scheme being planned for the Fernhill Estate in Farnborough. The work focusses on hard to treat properties. The Heronwood scheme will become an exemplar scheme for the promotion of what is achievable through the Green Deal.

**Housing and Health**

Rushmoor Health and Well-Being Partnership are updating the Rushmoor Health Improvement Plan. We recognise that overcrowded and poor housing conditions contribute to poor health and some health problems make it very difficult for people to maintain a tenancy or mortgage. Environmental Health and Housing officers are working together to raise the profile of housing in the strategic public health agenda at both the district and county levels. We are also committed to ensuring practical steps work well to ensure our staff can signpost and / or make referrals to the right health care services.

Going forward we want to ensure other agencies are well informed about the housing and related environmental health services the council offers.

New actions for this theme are:

- Monitor the impact of affordable rent on neighbourhoods, in particular the housing choice available to non-benefit claiming low-income households.
- Monitor the impact of the introduction of fixed term tenancies.
- Ensuring agencies are informed about the housing and related environmental health services the council offers.
Conclusion

This update reflects on our successes as well as the challenges we continue to face as the council and partners work to assist residents to secure good quality accommodation in the borough. The flexibility provided through the annual updating process ensures that the 2011-16 strategy document and the four key themes remain relevant:

1. Housing Supply and the deliver of good quality housing
2. Homelessness and Homelessness prevention
3. Housing to meet the needs of specific groups
4. Neighbourhoods and housing standards

The 2013/14 update will be prepared alongside a new Strategic Housing Market Assessment. This will provide an opportunity to assess our strategic approach in the context of a more up to date sub regional evidence base.