

CPA Balancing Housing Markets

Summary of key points from our submission



▪ **Key Drivers in Our Housing Market**

Wychavon is an attractive area to live and work, and is a high demand area as evidenced by new house building and high demand for housing association stock. Issues such as inward migration, increasing population overall, ageing population, reduced household size, and increasing affordability gap have an impact on our housing needs. The severest needs are concentrated within the three towns of Droitwich Spa, Evesham and Pershore, but needs also spread across our rural areas, particularly in the areas east of Evesham and in an arc around Droitwich Spa. Our strategies seek to address the imbalances as identified through our own research.

▪ **Our recent housing achievements**

We have:

- delivered **935** new affordable homes since stock transfer, through LASHG programme
- of these new affordable homes most have been delivered in the three towns, reflecting the areas of greatest need. The homes have been across all range of house types and sizes, but the majority are 2 and 3 bed houses, and 1 bed flats
- agreed to support a further **98** homes which we expect to be delivered in 2003/2005 subject to LASHG transitional funding arrangements
- of the 935 new homes, **137** are supported housing
- delivered **72** new homes on rural exception sites, with a further **5** bungalows under construction
- delivered **8** shared ownership properties (2003) with a further **15** presently under construction
- reached the revised deposit stage of the local plan review
- established our housing land availability system compliant with PPG3 requirements
- 62.21% of all housing completions 2002/03 were on brownfield sites
- secured new affordable housing through Section 106 agreements
- approved our SPG on affordable housing
- delivered 12% of total house completions as affordable housing (2002-03) compared to 10% in 1999/2000
- produced our Private Sector Renewal Policy - which will target customers and properties in greatest need and help private landlords to increase and/or improve the level of tenanted stock in our district
- produced our Homelessness Strategy which will seek to prevent homelessness, ensure sufficient accommodation for homeless people, and provide support to prevent a cycle of homelessness.

▪ **How we influence our housing market**

Achieving Regional, National and Local Priorities - We contribute to the rural renaissance, and providing pathways of choice for householders by:

- helping to develop sustainable communities by providing opportunities for local jobs, housing and access to services as evidenced by the rural regeneration strategy of the local plan review, our on-going work toward bringing forward rural exception sites, involvement in vital villages programme and providing grant assistance through our housing grants and renewal programme
- enabling people to exercise different housing choices within their own locality as evidenced by the pilot local lettings policies, pilot choice based lettings and helping deliver rural exception sites
- revised Local Plan policies based on making the best use of land and buildings to meet local housing needs and provide choice
- support initiatives such as shared ownership and Homebuy to promote housing options.

Partnership Working - We work with a wide range of internal and external partners to inform and deliver our targets. We have:

- strong links between service units to help formulate and refine policy and working practices in particular housing and planning through regular meetings with development control, policy and the development officer
- strong links with our RSL partners and the development industry through liaison meetings; individual meetings with RSL to discuss their development programmes; and the recent attendance of our LSVT housing associations Chief Executives at Executive Board
- partnerships to inform and help implement specific housing issues such as the Mental Health Working Group, Supporting People Commissioning and Strategy Groups
- partnerships to deal specific regeneration projects, for example, Evesham Riverside
- partnerships to inform private sector initiatives such as the Landlords Forum (Summer 2003).

Community Leadership and Consultation - Strong leadership based on agreed priorities and shared knowledge is a key part in meeting customer aspirations. We have strong leadership within the Council: by adopting a 'Team Wychavon' approach to everything we do strengthening the links between SMT and the Executive Board through quarterly meetings on performance review through the launch of the Middle Managers Group in July to help build capacity for the future.

We have a strong community leadership role demonstrated by our work on:

- Pershore Hospital and the South Worcestershire PCT
- Pershore Garage site developments
- Rural regeneration priorities arising from Local Plan Key Issues Consultation
- The Mental Health scheme for Droitwich

We listen to our residents and work with them to achieve priorities, for example:

- consultation on the local plan review, housing strategy, housing renewal grant, MORI poll
- health forums and questionnaires to inform PCT consultation
- action area plan for Droitwich Spa
- Youth issues identified through Parties in the Park
- Housing Needs Survey
- Stock Condition Survey
- Community Safety – face to face perception survey.

CPA Balancing Housing Markets Self Assessment

October 2003



1. How well do we understand our housing market and developed the right proposals to help balance our housing markets

1.1 Do we have the right research base to understand our housing market?

We have a good understanding of the housing market including open market, social housing, and issues relating to private renting. Information sources used to inform our strategies (see Section 1.3.) are outlined in Appendix 3 (Evid.1.1.1). Our Housing in Wychavon – Key Data (Evid. 1.1.2.) document forms a summary of information from these sources and includes information about our residents, the district, the economy and our workforce, housing stock and condition, supply and demand. This information is now being shared across the Council and with our partners in determining relevant issues and actions. We will update this document on an annual basis and see it as a key document in informing the way we work.

We strive to obtain the right information for Wychavon, and acknowledge further information is required in relation to key worker housing, the private rented sector, dwelling mix (in terms of tenure and size) and valuation information. We will undertake joint working, with neighbouring authorities to address these issues (Evid. 1.1.3). A consultant was appointed to provide valuation information to inform our Urban Capacity Study and has advised on development costs in relation to a number of large schemes. We are not complacent and recognise that intelligent data is key to achieving successful outcomes and will continue to work with existing partners to address gaps.

Since our CPA pathfinding inspection, specifically in context of research bases, we have:

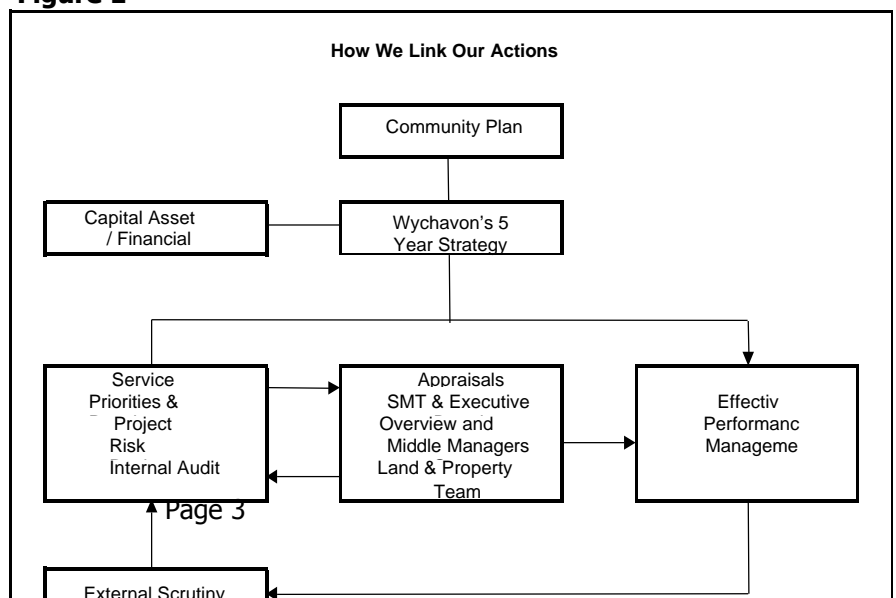
- agreed to undertake a desk top housing needs survey update (Evid. 1.1.4)
- agreed, and are presently writing a specification to commission a stock condition survey earlier than originally planned (Evid. 1.1.4)
- implemented our new Housing Waiting list computer information system
- implemented new I.T. system for grants
- produced our Housing in Wychavon - Key Data document.

1.2 How well do we develop and evolve our strategies and plans?

Long Term Ambitions and Priorities

We are currently developing a 5-year strategy “Wychavon’s Way Ahead” based on our local priorities, Community Plan themes and current priorities and ambitions set out in our three year Plan (see page 1 of our Corporate self assessment). **Figure 1**

We recognise the importance of linking our actions to corporate priorities (Evid.1.2.1). Housing and Planning have played a key role in helping to shape the Community Plan through representation on the Core Group and by sharing our Local Plan Key Issue and Town and Village consultation and Housing Strategy consultation. There are also strong links with the three LSP’s through ongoing work on



major regeneration projects in Droitwich Spa, Evesham and Pershore. The LSP's are currently reviewing their action plans. Consultation undertaken as part of this exercise will further help to inform the Community Plan (Evid.1.2.2) and the Council's objectives. We have strengthened our Service Plans to show how each service contributes to the priorities and promises, including improvement plans and identifying risks and recognised the need to extend our longer-term financial plans to cover five years in tandem with the five year strategy. This will ensure that we are using our resources to best effect to meet defined aims – See Corporate Assessment.

We have responded to a wide range of consultation highlighting affordable housing as a local priority and clarified the priority given to housing. Housing issues are now explicit in our goals and are a key priority for improvement. Our housing improvement plan sets out our vision of excellence, which we hope to achieve within five years.

We have taken on board the CPA recommendations to address social inclusion and equality issues by:

- assigning responsibility for social inclusion and equalities to two members of the Executive Board
- producing an Equalities Action Plan (2003-2005) and Year 1 review of the Race Equalities Scheme (Evid.1.2.3)
- working with consultants, Link Support Services to develop a strategy based on good practice already happening
- staff and member workshops (Evid.1.2.4)
- ensuring that it is mainstreamed.

We are currently reviewing our plans and strategies to evaluate their impact on local and national priorities. A similar exercise has been undertaken in reviewing partnership effectiveness through a series of 70 structured interviews (Evid.1.2.5)

Leadership and Consultation

Consultation is key to the development and review of the Council's strategies and plans and our understanding of the housing market. We encourage people to become actively involved in our plans rather than just inform in order to get the right plans in place (see Question 1.3). (Evid.1.2.6. & 1.2.7). The results of the MORI Poll, and the Residents Panel informed corporate objectives. Techniques such as Planning for Real and exhibitions have been to great effect to inform the Local Plan Review and a range of regeneration sites such as Pershore High Street, Droitwich Canals SPG, Evesham High Street and the Evesham Riverside SPG's, and Primsland Way Green Doorstep. Our consultation on the Local Plan Development Strategy won Government recognition for best practice.

In developing our strategies, we look to balance national, regional and local priorities. The development of our Local Plan Development Strategy is a key example – see Box 1.1.

We recognise that we should involve our Members more in regional debates to inform our strategies and this is now in hand with other Worcestershire Local Government family.

Focus groups were set up with internal/external partners to develop Local Plan policies, the affordable housing SPG and the Housing Strategy and included our RSL partners, the House Builders Federation, consultants and developers. The focus groups ensure the application of a consistent approach and the development of realistic policies that our partners are confident will deliver our agreed objectives in practice (Evid.1.2.8).

Box 1.1 Using Consultation to Shape Our Strategies

Local Plan Development Strategy was driven by community support for:

- rural regeneration
- Evesham regeneration aims
- addressing Lorries in the Vale issues, and
- urban focussed development.

Despite initially receiving a Certificate of Non Conformity from the County, we balanced our community's priorities against our Structure Plan requirements to provide a strategy to meet Wychavon's needs. Agreement with the County has now been reached.

One of the roles of the Affordable Housing Scrutiny Group (AHS Group) to be set up in October will be to evaluate how house builders and private sector partners can be more fully involved in our Housing Strategies. Questionnaires were sent to local stakeholders, our Members, Parish Councils, RSL's and various voluntary organisations to inform the Housing Strategy, and the use of customer interviews and benchmarking as part of the Housing Best Value service review (Evid.1.2.9.) Similar techniques have been used to collect the views of service providers and customers to inform our recently approved Regulatory Reform Order (Housing Grants and Renewal Policy), (Evid.1.2.10) Homelessness Strategy (Evid 1.2.11) and young people consultation. The Supporting People Strategic Review meeting involves Housing, Health service providers, social services and the probation service. Our Head of Planning has been asked on several occasions by the ODPM to give advice to other local authorities on improving planning performance.

Members take an active role in taking projects forward to meet the needs of the district or specific areas – see Box 1.2. as an example. The development of broadband opportunities in Elmley Castle is another example where a local Member highlighted an issue and has worked with officers, the community and a private sector provider to make something happen on the ground. This demonstrates a good example of an initiative that will help rural regeneration and promote sustainable development.

Future Plans

We believe that feedback is important when developing strategies and we use our TWM magazine to tell our residents how their comments have been taken on board and their role in taking plans forward. (Evid.1.2.12). Four feedback events were held on the Key Issues consultation and a database set up to inform interested parties of other key stages of the Plan.

Box 1.2. Members Help us Shape our Strategies

Evesham Riverside Project

- Members key drivers in promoting a strategic approach to the area to avoid piecemeal approach in dealing with planning applications
- series of Development Brief adopted between Nov 2001 and Sept 2002
- stronger position in negotiating design, densities and providing opportunities for market and affordable housing
- approach tested at appeal
- feedback from consultation indicates a high level of satisfaction for the outcomes particularly with regard to design elements.

Clearly defined actions and time-scales are set out in our Homelessness Strategy for the benefit of residents, staff and partners. To enable us to achieve these actions we have agreed additional staff and restructuring of our Housing Section – see Appendix 4. The introduction of project officers and the empty homes officer will allow a greater focus on implementing, informing and delivering strategies particularly with regard to preventing homelessness and making properties available rather than focussing just new build.

We will be setting up a new housing panel to develop policy, and drive forward the new affordable housing agenda. (Evid.1.1.4 - Item 8). Further details are explained in 1.3 below.

We will continue to use the information sources/intelligent data set out in 1.1, and Appendix 3, to prioritise between different housing needs and how our strategies can address these needs to best effect. The role of the AHS Group will be invaluable in sharing and disseminating information to staff and partners. Regular monitoring is also essential in developing our strategies and meeting the needs of the housing market – see question 3.1. Resources are set out at 2.1.

Draft Regional Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG11) incorporating Secretary of State's Proposed Changes – Sept 2003 proposes changes to the approach to housing provision and a two stage recycling target for housing land of at least 65% up to 70%. The Regional Strategy for the West Midlands (Working draft - July 2003) also proposes changes to where housing investment will be directed in the future. The implications of these changes will need to be assessed and taken on board in both the housing strategy and the local plan.

1.3 Do we have the right strategies to help balance our housing market?

We believe that balancing housing markets is about providing reasonable access to housing for all sectors both existing and future, in all tenures and across a broad range of needs and demands. Consultation such as MORI poll, Community Plan, Local Plan and Housing Strategies with our stakeholders tells us that this is their view too and that there is support for development which helps sustain and support local communities. We believe good research, understanding, partnership working and consultation ensure that that our priorities and plans are the right ones for our district. Figure 1 demonstrates how we have brought our plans together to ensure common goals are met and resources used to best effect.

We now give greater priority to housing, and affordable housing is an explicit goal in developing the five-year strategy as outlined in question 1.2. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed on 9 September to set up a working group to deal with housing issues, which will highlight the priority given to housing to both Members and staff. (Evid.1.1.4 - Item 8). This priority is justified in the light of consultation undertaken with our residents who saw affordable housing as one of three top priorities. In addition to the strategies and plans outlined in question 1.2, we have identified key policies relevant to housing in the Housing Key Data document and a Partnership Review document (see Corporate Self Assessment).

We revised our housing targets and priorities in the light of consultation with our residents and partners and recognise the importance of looking at more imaginative ways of addressing the housing issues that face us. For example, our private sector housing renewal policies aim to help those in greatest need by providing grants for repairs, to allow people to live in their own homes if this is the most suitable solution. (Evid.1.2.10 page 11). We are also looking at improving service management at a strategic level through the restructuring of the housing department and are looking at ways of improving housing choice.

Local Plan

Our Local Plan contains a range of policies aimed at making the best use of land and buildings in accordance with the aims of PPG3 and the County Structure Plan. Relevant policies are set out at Part 6 of the Housing Key Data document (Evid.1.1.2). We have responded to our Housing Needs Survey and produced affordable housing policies based on lower thresholds in order to meet defined needs. The Plan is supported by our adopted Affordable Housing SPG prepared by us in consultation with our RSL partners (Evid.1.3.1). With these policies we are able to negotiate through Section 106 agreements a greater proportion of affordable housing on qualifying sites than we were able previously, and better housing mix and types for example the allocated site in Tibberton. An existing SPG on House Extensions (Evid.1.3.2), and the production of a draft design SPG planned for Jan 2004 will support our design policies. Further SPG's on developer contributions and open space provision are currently being updated to reflect revised Government guidance and are planned to go to committee in October.

The Plan's format is based on achieving the Government's four sustainability aims and has been appraised on this basis. Its policies will help us to increase accessibility to local housing, employment and services to help sustain and balance communities. We carefully chose the location of the proposed allocated sites to meet the government's urban focus and to help sustain local communities, having regard to the sustainability of existing settlements. Annual monitoring will allow us to assess the success of the Plan's policies (Evid.1.3.3 & 1.3.4.) and to inform our Housing Strategy.

Housing Strategy and supporting Strategies

To support our Housing Strategy we have produced a number of supporting strategies and policies such as Housing Grants and Renewal Policy – July 2003, Homelessness Strategy – July 2003. We also intend to consider an Empty Homes Strategy. The documents have been prepared in response to needs identified through consultation and information gathering. The Homelessness Strategy identifies 79 actions with timescales for completion for the period 2003-2006. Proposed restructuring of the Housing Department will allow staff resources to be better deployed to achieve the defined aims. As part of our Housing Strategy, we have actively encouraged forms of tenure other than social rented on new build sites, such as shared equity (for example on the former Worcestershire Hotel site, Droitwich Spa and Hadzor Hall).

We recognised through regional guidance, County Structure Plan, our partners and as a result of consultation that we needed to develop the links between housing and employment more fully. As members of the Worcestershire Partnership, we have contributed to the Framework for Rural Action – Worcestershire Action Plan (Evid.1.3.5) which sets out ten key aims to modernise and diversify the rural economy to make it more sustainable with four actions specifically relating to the provision of affordable housing. We have recognised the importance of supporting a place where people can live and work in our own Community Plan and our annual report. Housing and employment is also a theme that is being considered by Evesham Market Towns Partnership and the Evesham LSP. Information gathered from a workshop held on 11th September will be fed back to the Community Plan core group.

Private Sector

Our Housing Grants and Renewal policy (Evid 1.2.10) was approved under the requirements of the RRO in July 2003. It was drawn up following consultation with former customers of our grant assistance service (via a postal questionnaire) and organisations with an interest in our service, such as OT's, CAB, Age Concern and our Members (via a workshop). We recognise that there are issues in the District, such as:

- owner occupiers and private sector tenants, who do not have the financial resources to solve their housing problems (people who have low income and/or low equity)
- vulnerable people who wish to maintain their independence in their own home
- assistance to help people move home where this is the most appropriate course of action
- delayed hospital discharge, and
- issues of unfitness, and energy efficiency.

Our policy includes:

- researching alternative forms of financial assistance, in addition to mandatory and discretionary grants, such as loans and guarantees
- advisory services in partnership with Care & Repair to home owners, tenants and landlords
- work in partnership with other agencies to meet local needs.

In the past we have used the grant system and LASHG funds to assist those in greatest need. But we recognise that we should use our resources including land, expertise, and our links with partner organisations in more innovative ways to help a greater range of people. For example we are investigating setting up a loan guarantee scheme. Following the results of our forthcoming private sector stock condition survey (anticipated post Christmas 2003) we will identify actions within our Private Sector Housing Strategy. The Strategy will include SMART targets, and link back to financial resources. We do not currently have proposals for targeting specific areas in our district, but this may change following the results of the stock condition survey.

2.1 How well do we work corporately to help balance the housing market?

The last CPA inspection recognised the strong links and successful working relationship between officers and Members in our Planning and Housing services, both in terms of policy formulation, day-to-day joint working on housing needs assessments, and development control advice etc. The link between the Development Officer in Housing and a member of the Policy team ensures a consistency of approach and helps to inform development control decisions, and any subsequent appeals (Evid 1.1.1 - Notes from meetings). The Development Officer also attends a fortnightly meeting with Planning Policy, DC and landscape staff to discuss new applications. Planning, housing and legal staff also regularly seek to improve our practices in relation to specific planning and housing issues such as the provision of shared ownership properties in rural and urban areas, or achieving a consistent approach in the wording of Section 106 agreements. Officers in Environmental Health and Housing now meet regularly in order to share skills and knowledge in respect of private sector renewal issues. Our amalgamation of the Housing and Revenues service has facilitated greater sharing of information in order to provide a more holistic service to our customers. The establishment of the AHS Group will provide the opportunity for representatives from housing, planning, economic development, property, legal and finance to tackle many corporate issues appropriate to housing market. As outlined at 1.3 the Overview and Scrutiny

Committee now has a greater role in overseeing housing issues. Board members have also been allocated different responsibilities to ensure that targets are met. The Community Plan and links with the LSP's provide an opportunity for joined up thinking both within the Council and with external partners and our residents – see 1.3.

Capacity/Resources

See response to 1.2. relating to financial planning and links to 5 year strategy. We are exploring opportunities for joint funding through CADPOG/CHOG and with other adjoining districts (Evid. 1.1.3, and Evid.2.1.1) that may include joint bids for ADP funding. Additionally we are working with the County Council for "kick start" funding (via the Regional Housing Board), and working toward the expansion of the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) services. Work with Care & Repair has resulted in a successful bid for more funding from the Department of Health for a hospital discharge scheme. It has been recognised that the housing department needed intervention to be restructured in order to achieve agreed targets. Staff have received additional training to update skills and to adapt to changes in funding and housing issues. Investment in new IT will assist in capturing data and analysis in order to determine priorities and to put in place effective systems to help day to day procedures. Our plans to introduce a single points system will assist in comparing data and speed time in inputting and analysis. We recognise that this is dependent upon agreement with our partners.

We are also in the process of reviewing the land that we own, with a view to bringing sites forward for affordable housing development in partnership with our RSL partners. Housing Development, Planning and Property officers are undertaking this process, and will be fed through the AHS Group. Many of the sites are in rural locations. Once this process is complete, we will know how many units they are likely to provide.

The unexpected removal of the LASHG funding regime announced in February 2003 and the proposed changes to PPG3 and cancellation of Circular 6/98 are areas of concern and we need to examine the impact of these changes. The removal of public subsidy will directly impact on the ability to deliver planned schemes and the suggested abolition of rural exception sites may impact on the ability to deliver affordable homes in rural areas. We are too far through the Local Plan Review process to incorporate any changes that would allow us to identify allocated affordable housing sites although the Revised Deposit Plan identifies indicative affordable housing targets on allocated sites. Having said that we are not willing to sit back - we are proactively investigating new working practices, and funding sources. For example we have recently had a meeting with our Head of Planning, the Rural Housing Enabler, and Offenham Parish Council to discuss options for bringing forward a rural exception site, with a view to using alternative funding sources through the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme.

Member capacity and training is set out in the Corporate Assessment. Examples of specific training relating to housing and planning includes housing strategy held on 3rd October, (Evid.2.1.3) training on sustainability training both corporate and aimed specifically at the Local Plan and training on Planning issues October 2003 (Evid. 2.1.4). Energy efficiency training is currently being set up.

Partnerships

We work with a range of partners to inform our strategies and priorities. We are presently undertaking a corporate wide assessment of partnership involvement to evaluate their contribution and outcomes (see Corporate Self-Assessment). Our key partners include: Housing Corporation, Supporting People Group, local authorities in the County (via Chief Planning Officer, and Chief Housing Officer Groups). Through these forums, cross boundary issues can be addressed. There is a new extra care forum to consider and implement extra care facilities on a countywide basis. An example of where we use partnerships to make things happen that we would not otherwise be able to achieve is given in Box 1.3.

Box 1.3. We use Partnerships to make things happen

Rear of High Street, Pershore
Multiple land ownership problems and site constraints were frustrating efforts to enhance the area so we:

- involved the Civic Trust in the development brief and design solutions;
- set up a consortium of landowners;
- the project will deliver new housing (including affordable housing) opportunities in this important town centre location
- will deliver a new town centre car park.

Members of the Wychavon Housing Consortium and Housing Association Preferred Development Partners are outlined at Part 9 and 10 of the Housing Key data document (Evid.1.1.2), Housing Strategy consultees see page 51/52 of the Housing Strategy; Housing Grants and Renewal Policy - see page 7 of this strategy, Local Plan consultation is outlined at 1.2. and Community Plan Core Group members are outlined in the Corporate Assessment. Health partnerships include: Healthy Living Partnership with Environmental Health as lead partner; Better Care Higher Standards, Mental Health Liaison and Supporting People Strategy.

Leadership, Equalities and Social Inclusion

As outlined in 1.2. we see consultation as key in ensuring agreed objectives and taking plans forward. However, we are not afraid to pursue our ideas if we think that it is the right way forward. For example, the Local Plan Development Strategy – see Box 1.1. (Evid.2.1.5.). We also sought local support for the controversial proposal to develop garage courts in Pershore by inviting local people to design their own solutions. After identification of a need, and in partnership with social services and Spa HA, we have successfully delivered the Kings Court scheme in Droitwich Spa for new accommodation for people with learning difficulties. Despite initial local opposition we have continued to work with Evesham and Pershore Housing Association (EPHA) to bring forward a scheme in Droitwich for those with mental health problems. In this case, we have recently granted planning permission, we own the site, and have agreed a price for the land.

2.2 Are we pursuing the right actions and initiatives and are the outcomes for our local residents and the housing market making the right difference?

We consider that we are pursuing the right actions and with the production of the Homelessness Strategy and the Housing Renewals Policy for example have put in place sub strategies/actions to help meet the wider aims of the Housing Strategy and Community Plan. The links between Planning and Housing are well established and helps to ensure consistency of actions and the development of robust policies to support aims. We consider our strategies against stated priorities. We are improving our options appraisal and risk assessment processes – see Corporate Assessment.

Our Local Plan is based on achieving the Government’s sustainability aims, is urban focussed with an element of housing provision in sustainable rural locations to address rural regeneration aims, with the aims of PPG3 and the County Structure Plan. Guidance contained in PPG3 has provided us with a stronger position in negotiating dwelling mix on sites to provide for balanced communities. Revised policies also seek to ensure that smaller dwellings are not lost through large extensions and thus push the prices of these properties out of the reach of first time buyers. Sustainable building practices are advocated with the reuse of materials and waste minimisation, which support the policies on the reuse of buildings. Relevant policies are set out in our Local Plan, and page 29 of our Key housing Data document (Evid.1.1.2).

<p>Box 1.4. Section 106s</p> <p>Since last CPA inspection we have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • updated our Sec 106 SPG • set up a Sec 106 protocol • put a Sec 106 custodian in place • report on current Sec 106’s to Committee • transparency in decision making – all DC Committee reports include Heads of terms and/or amounts of contributions levied • intend to spend PDG monies on creating model agreements.
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We are achieving Government performance targets that are regularly monitored – see 3.1. The production of SPG’s assists in bringing development forward of a high quality and in securing relevant developer contributions. Monitoring of the Plan through the Sustainability Appraisal was done in conjunction with the corporate sustainability working group. Since our last inspection we have set up new procedures and systems for controlling and monitoring our Section 106’s - see Box 1.4.

Housing Development

We have made progress towards meeting out affordable housing targets and these are set out in the Executive Board Briefing – 17th September (Evid.2.2.1). There is a greater focus on quality within our strategies and the production of the design guide SPG in Jan 2004 will further assist our efforts in

securing quality developments that meet the needs of our residents. Besford Court is an example of a development where the careful selection of materials and design has helped to integrate affordable housing into a wider development. We have produced and widely consulted on development briefs for major sites such as the Droitwich Canals project, rear of High Street, Pershore and the Evesham Riverside. Issues of designing out crime are addressed through fortnightly meetings with the Crime Risk Manager to advise on planning applications. Comments are reported to Committee.

We are working collaboratively with our RSL partners in their pilot scheme of home choice, and previously in the local letting policy pilot. This will promote choice for local people and will give us the opportunity to assess local community needs.

We will continue to monitor our actions and their outputs to ensure that we are directing our efforts in the right places. Some of actions have only just been implemented, or are in the process of being implemented following consultation and analysis of information and have not been in place long enough for monitoring to be meaningful. This is particularly so for our Housing Grants and renewal policy, and the actions contained in our Homelessness Strategy.

3.1 How well do we monitor our progress and assess the impact of our work?

Corporate Monitoring

See corporate assessment and appendix 1 for performance indicators.

Local Plan Monitoring

Our Housing Land Availability system is the main system we use to monitor the current and future balance of housing supply. We have updated the system in line with County Structure Plan and PPG3 requirements – see list of reports. We have a similar system for employment land availability. As members of the Worcestershire Technical Officers Group which comprises County and District officers, we share good practice and information collected. The group has developed a common data to ensure consistency across the County. The system is due to go live in January 2004 and is based on our existing system. Our system allows us to inform West Midlands Housing Return, Performance Indicators and Housing Flow Reconciliation form (to the ODPM). Members are informed of key trends through the production of Information Packs.

The annual monitoring plan supports the Plan, Monitor, and Manage approach (PPG 3) and will assist in determining whether the Plan’s policies are working effectively. We have undertaken a sustainability appraisal of the Plan and the measures outlined will be monitored annually to ensure the Plan is working towards sustainable development and balanced communities (Evid 3.1.1). The Local Plan contains a policy on phasing to ensure that land is released and available to meet the District’s needs. We have produced a Section 106 database to monitor contributions and their impact. A revised Planning Obligations SPG is planned for October. A risk management system is in place for the Local Plan (Evid 3.1.2).

Good design is recognised as a key objective. Liaison meetings between development control, policy and the housing development officer ensure that design issues are addressed at an early stage. Box 1.5. sets gives other examples of where we monitor good design. The production of the House Extensions SPG is promoted at pre-application meetings and is impacting on quality of applications received. Examples of schemes with good design include the new Pershore Town Council offices and Cowl Street, Evesham – a residential scheme for rent.

Housing Strategy, Homelessness Strategy, Private Sector Action Plans

Our existing IT systems allow us to monitor limited data on these subjects. We have recognised that this area needs to be

<p>Box 1.5. Monitoring Good Design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• annual distinction in design award (for buildings)• annual built in quality award (for good construction processes)• annual planning staff tour of good design sites• early production of development briefs on major sites such as Evesham Riverside and monitoring of success at appeal• responses from Consultation• Local Plan monitoring.

improved and we are intending to implement a new homelessness computer software module, and are working on introducing IT systems for grants. We are investigating the use of a geographical information system which will allow us to plot various information that will highlight “hotspots” so we can target our services to where the need is greatest e.g. homelessness. Regular meetings with RSL’s allow us to monitor actions and gain feedback on the Housing Strategy, the Local Plan and day to day working procedures. We intend to review the impact and effectiveness of our Life Time Homes policy, which previously applied to new affordable houses funded via LASHG. The Development Officer monitors progress on development schemes and funding which is reported to Committee. We are in the process of developing a project plan to rectify the weaknesses identified by ODPM comments on our Housing Strategy

3.2 Have we learnt from our actions and what we are doing to improve?

We are keen to learn from others and share good practice. We do this through:

- pre-planning application discussions
- housing enablers meetings with all districts in the County (which is also attended by Housing Corporation Officers, and the Worcestershire Rural Housing Enabler) (Evid 1.1.1)
- regular Housing and Planning Meetings (Evid 1.1.1)
- regular liaison between Policy Plan, DC, landscape and housing development officers
- CADPOG and CHOG – these groups have prepared a joint report on balancing housing markets to discuss future actions
- meetings with other LA’s to discuss common problem of provision of affordable housing e.g. Stratford and Wyre Forest based in part on the recognition that housing markets operate wider than district boundaries leading to greater need for joint working with neighbouring authorities
- good practice promoted by the other external bodies and authorities
- work with social services, health and probation to
- develop a 5 year supporting people strategy
- strong links with DC/Housing
- shared knowledge from Worcestershire Technical Officers Group (to achieve a County wide HLA database)
- wide range of consultation – we have proposals for a further MORI residents survey and intend to set up a Health Forum with South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust (SWPCT). Review to take place next year
- Homelessness Officers Group, and a wide range of specialist forums.

Box 1.6. Using learning to change the way we work

- Evesham High Street
- study tours to Germany and Holland with County Council representatives to evaluate examples of good practice
- awareness raising talk from Ben Hamilton-Baillee an expert on UK and European transport issues and ways of promoting cycling and walking
- involvement of specialist groups such as Street to advise on data collection and scheme implementation
- responding to issues raised through consultation.

See Box 1.6. for examples of where we use learning to change the way we work.

We’ve learnt from our residents, service providers and partners, our staff, our Best Value Improvement Plan, Customer Satisfaction Surveys (as used by Care & Repair) (Evid 3.2.1) and a range of external organisations that housing is a priority and this is reflected in our promises and priorities. Box 1.7. sets out ways in which we learn what is best for Wychavon.

Box 1.7. How we know what is best for Wychavon

- Monitoring – see 3.1.
- Asking and listening to our residents partners and service providers
- Piloting new initiatives such as the local lettings scheme, choice based lettings and Parish Plans so that we can test, learn and improve before committing resources
- Good research
- Advise from our partners and other service providers.

We recognise:

- that intelligent data is required to inform our priorities and actions
- that we need to involve our members more to influence Regional Housing and Planning Strategies, and the Regional Housing Board to influence their capital investment decisions
- that we need to be more innovative in the way we approach housing solutions if we are going
- to achieve our promises.

To address the above we will:

- work more closely with RSL's and house builders
- work with a rural housing enabler to help achieve our targets and improve our information
- establish the AHS (Affordable Housing Scrutiny) Group (Oct 2003) to comprise officers of all relevant departments of the Council who have an involvement in the housing market, key councillors, and, as the need arises other members such as the rural housing enabler, members of the CLA or Parish councillors (areas of discussion will include: improving the way we use our existing land resources to bring forward new build; standardising Sec 106's to improve consistency and addressing tenure needs other than social rented and information sharing)
- facilitate more Parish Plans, which may identify specific housing issues. Parish Plans can support the Local Plan as SPG's. We are looking at encouraging a pilot study
- undertake the Stock condition survey a year earlier than planned
- explore further opportunities for partnership working (for example Wyre Forest DC) to look at the issue of funding new affordable housing developments in the post LASHG regime abolition and the issue of housing for key workers
- restructure the Housing Department – see question 2.1, and Appendix 4
- focus on the issues of quality, monitoring and achievements in our Housing Strategy due December
- deliver our Homelessness Strategy.

We have put a lot of effort into examining our priorities and putting in place systems to improve our service. We recognise that what matters is the difference our customers see in terms of addressing needs, quality, efficiency and effectiveness of our services.

Particular outcomes worthy of note include:

- implementation of new IT resulting in greater efficiencies and reducing process times for customers (including housing needs assessments, and speedier processing of housing applications)
- clearing the backlog to input applications to our housing waiting list
- better advice through clearer leaflets, plain English strategies, personal letters and honesty if we can't help
- making it easier for our customers to meet us with surgeries held in shops
- better liaison with housing associations and social services to address needs
- tenants have benefited from choice based lettings particularly in Droitwich Spa
- better links with parishes and us through the work of the rural housing enabler
- the introduction of a range of SPG's has improved our relationship with house builders and our ability to deliver improved developments
- a wider choice of grant through our Housing Grant & Renewal Policy
- continued delivery of our affordable housing programme.

• **Evidence 1.1**

- 1.1.1 Information sources set out in Appendix 3
 - Stock Condition Survey (1994)
 - Fordham's Housing Needs Survey (2001)
 - Extract of reports from HLA
 - Homelessness Audit
 - Notes from Housing and RSL Liaison Meetings
 - Notes from Worcestershire Housing Enablers Meetings
- 1.1.2 Housing in Wychavon – Key Data
- 1.1.3 Balancing Housing Markets Report framework – CADPOG
- 1.1.4 Executive Board Agenda and minutes 2nd September 2003.
 - Item 5 Future affordable housing in Wychavon
 - Item 6 Changes to the Statutory Housing Register
 - Item 7 Housing Needs Survey -desktop update
 - Item 8 Delivering Affordable Housing
 - Item 9 Tackling Capacity issues within the Housing Services

• **Evidence 1.2**

- 1.2.1 Housing Service Plan and Planning Service Plan
- 1.2.2 Invitation to the Evesham Market Town and LSP Members 11/09/03
- 1.2.3 Equalities Plan/Race Equalities Plan
- 1.2.4 Staff and member workshop
- 1.2.5 Strategy/ Partnership evaluation results & recommendations
- 1.2.6 Local Plan consultation photos/TWM articles
- 1.2.7 Copy of questionnaire
- 1.2.8 Focus group notes
- 1.2.9 Housing Best Value service review
- 1.2.10 Housing Grants and Renewal Policy (pages 7 & 8, Appendix A, and page 11)
- 1.2.11 Homelessness Strategy and Audit
- 1.2.12 TWM articles

• **Evidence 1.3**

- 1.3.1 Affordable Housing SPG
- 1.3.2 House Extensions Advice Note SPG
- 1.3.3 Local Plan Monitoring Section
- 1.3.4 Monitoring Section from Sustainability Appraisal
- 1.3.5 Worcestershire Partnership Economy & Transport Theme Group 16 July 2003

• **Evidence 2.1**

- 2.1.1 Invitation to Stratford meeting to discuss funding opportunities, and handouts
- 2.1.2 Capital Strategy & Asset Management Plan 2003/04 - 2006/07.
- 2.1.3 Housing Strategy Workshop 3 October 2003
- 2.1.4 Member Training
- 2.1.5 Development Strategy leaflet

- **Evidence 2.2**

- 2.2.1 Executive Board Briefing Report 17 September 2003
- 2.2.2 Notes from Crime Risk Manager Meetings

- **Evidence 3.1**

- 3.1.1 Sustainability Appraisal measures
- 3.1.2 Local Plan Risk Assessment

- **Evidence 3.2**

- 3.2.1 Care & Repair Wychavon Client Satisfaction Form

APPENDIX 2

OUR AMBITIONS

Are for a Well Managed Council, Healthy and safe Environment, Now and for the Future and a Prosperous Local Economy. Our targets for housing 2003/2004 are:

- to reduce the number of homelessness approaches by 5% by more proactive prevention work compared to 2002/03 (Government target);
- to develop 120 additional affordable homes within the District (this being based on our best estimate of new build for the year in liaison with our RSL partners, and monitoring of planning approvals and completions);
- to get the Local Development Plan to Local Inquiry Stage.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

We have a strategic basket of key measures to assess our performance. Our key performance indicators are:

PROMISE28	Develop 120 additional affordable homes within the district;
BV62	The proportion of unfit private sector dwellings made fit or demolished as a direct result of action by the local authority;
BV64	The number of private sector vacant dwellings that are returned into occupation or demolished during 2003/04 as a direct result of action by the local authority;
BV183	The average length of stay in i) bed and breakfast accommodation and ii) hostel accommodation of households which include dependent children or a pregnant woman and which are unintentionally homeless and in priority need;
LOCAL	Proportion of homelessness applications on which the authority makes a decision and issues written notification to the applicant within 33 working days.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION USED

- Stock Condition Survey – a survey was carried out in 1994. We will be undertaking a further one this financial year (2003/04).
- English House Condition Survey 2001;
- Housing Needs Survey – undertaken by Fordham Research in July 2001. To conform to the revised ODPM guidance, we have commissioned an update survey to be completed in Dec 2003. We are investigating how best to keep this information updated on a regular basis in the future. Analysis led to revised Local Plan policies including lower thresholds, policies on making the best use of land and buildings and affordable housing targets on allocated sites;
- Housing Land Availability - We monitor land availability via planning records on the location, numbers and tenures of housing sites that have planning consent. Reports are compiled for market and affordable housing and all rural exception sites and includes average densities, take-up of brownfield land, windfalls, sites available, completions, expiries, property types and bedspaces;
- Worcestershire Technical Officers Working Group - comprises members from all districts who meet to discuss and compare housing data and share good practice. See response to question 3.1 for further details;
- County and District Policy officers Group (CADPOG) and Chief Housing Officers Policy Group (CHOG) both groups now working together and reporting to County Chief Executives Group – provides opportunities to share good practice, develop joint working, collect data and compare development costs. We are currently looking at opportunities to work with Warwickshire and develop similar working groups;
- Housing Waiting list – in the past year we have introduced a new computer system, and updated housing needs forms. This has helped provide a clearer understanding of where the greatest needs for social housing exists, and identifies those applicants with a local connection necessary for determining rural exception sites. There is an annual rolling review of the Housing Waiting list.
- Homelessness statistics
- The Homelessness Audit has mapped the current provision of services across the district to inform needs and identify gaps in services
- Housing Advice – we plan to implement a new software module to our existing IT systems to monitor housing advice approaches, advice given and outcomes. New software will also allow us to monitor re-lets;
- Council Tax Information – used to monitor the number of properties in each band and the movement between bands;
- Benefits Information – provides information on the number of claimants and affordability issues;
- Right to Buy Property database;
- Our contaminated land officer provides information on contaminated land and helps to define development costs involved in bringing sites forward;
- Our building control consultancy provides information relating to stock condition and energy efficiency. Further information on energy efficiency is available from the Warwickshire Energy Advice/Affordable Warmth Strategy. Building Control also assisted with the production of Local Plan policies on access for all and advise on applications on requirements arising from the Disability Discrimination Act ;
- Rural Housing Enabler – we are working with the RHE to identify local needs and priorities; to facilitate the production of Parish Surveys and to develop existing links with the Youth Services to address the needs of young people;
- Census information 2001;
- Community Safety Strategy – informs the design of new development to enhance the quality of life;
- Local Strategic Partnerships link to the Community Plan and our Promises through the core group;
- RSL Meetings – regular meetings with RSL partners and housing and planning to discuss a range of issues including new provision, funding and the needs of existing tenants;
- Worcestershire Partnership Steering Group;
- Parish Plans and Village Design Statements – we hosted a joint event with CALC for Parish Councils to encourage the production of Parish Plans. We are currently producing a protocol which will set out the help that we can provide in producing these Plans and their role as SPG. Also working with individual parishes on a one to one basis;

- Black Ethnic Minorities – Evesham and Pershore Housing Association are currently undertaking research. We have provided information from the Housing Waiting List and existing tenants have been consulted;
- Supporting people mapping exercise into the existing provision to identify the gaps – a needs analysis has been commissioned (anticipated completion in October 2003) . We are also looking at setting up a database detailing adaptations already in place to match to clients needs;
- Draft Regional Housing Strategy and Regional Planning Guidance – guidance on regional and sub-regional issues;
- Empty Homes – we intend to develop an Empty Homes Strategy. A post has been identified in the housing section restructure to undertake this. Information on empty homes is outlined at page 21 of key data document;
- Local Plan Key Issues Consultation – generated 4,000 responses, the results of which were circulated to inform the Community Plan and Community Safety Strategy.

DETAILS OF HOUSING SERVICES RESTRUCTURING PROPOSALS

Proposals were presented to Executive Board for the restructuring of the Housing Section. This included 4 new posts and changes to existing posts including:

- 1 housing manager (process) 2yr. fixed term contract
- 1 senior housing needs project officer
- 1 property standards officer
- 1 empty homes officer 1 yr. fixed term contract
- changes to existing posts – housing manager strategy, senior housing needs project officer, refocused role for housing development officer.